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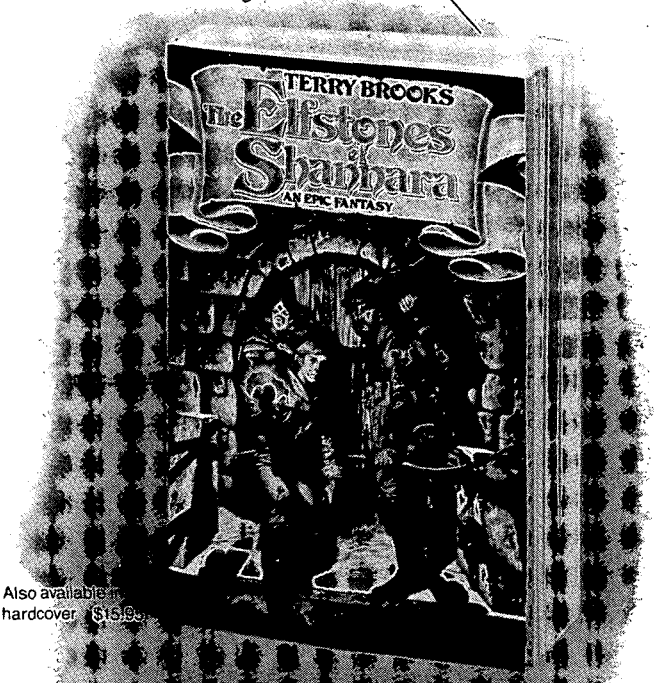

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SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE

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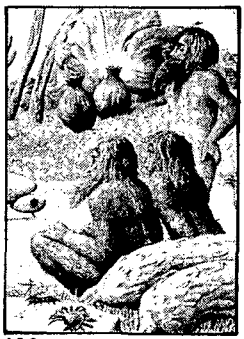

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UP FRONT

Kathleen Moloney

Nobody ever accused science fiction writers—or science fiction readers, for that matter—of being shy about expressing their opinions. *IAsfm* readers have plenty of evidence of that, since each month Dr. Asimov speaks out on anything from creationism to autograph seekers. This month, in addition to the Good Doctor's editorial, we have yet another forum for some of the most outspoken opinions we've read in a long while: a Profile of Harry Harrison, creator of the Stainless Steel Rat and other high-tech adventures. Mr. Harrison knows a lot about SF, and he definitely knows what he likes.

We're pleased with all of the fiction in this issue—contributions by Robert Young, who is an *IAsfm* regular, and Spider Robinson, who will become one if it's the last thing we do, are especially noteworthy—but there's a special story behind "Transisters," by Christine Renard. Ms. Renard was a highly regarded science fiction writer in France before her death, in 1979, and her work continues to be praised there. Thanks to the good judgment of John Brunner, who was her friend and who has become her translator, we have this story. Literally and figuratively, it translates beautifully into English.

Before we leave the subject of fiction, we should call your attention to page 138 and "War of Independence," by Stanley Schmidt. Mr. Schmidt's work used to appear regularly in *Analog*, but that got a little complicated when he became the magazine's editor. We're very pleased to see his work here and to deny the nasty rumor that editors are impossible to edit.

Finally, just when you thought you were getting used to our new look, we've got a newer one, both inside (columns and nonfiction pieces are now set in two columns; On Books has a new format; Conventional Calendar has a new location) and out (the full-bleed cover). We've also had a change in our staff. Those of you who pay close attention to mastheads already know this, but I'm pleased to tell those who have better things to do that Shawna McCarthy has been promoted to Senior Editor of *IAsfm*, which means that she will be more involved than ever in buying and editing stories ●

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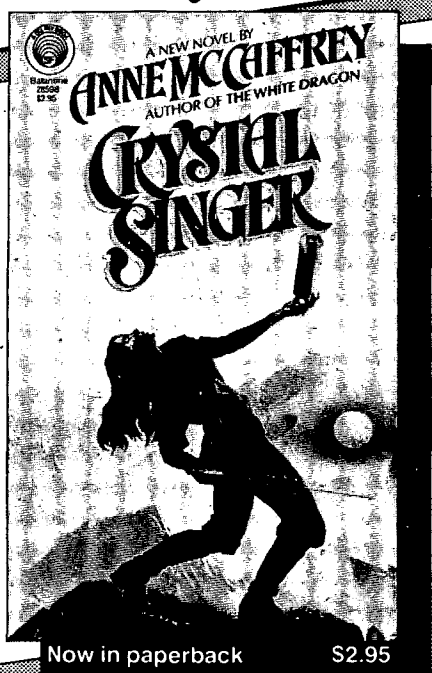

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EDITORIAL

MISSING THE BOAT

by Isaac Asimov

One of the important ways in which many of us show our pride in science fiction is to point out the successful predictions that are made in science fiction stories. This has been done so many times that I won't bore you now with one more listing of our victories.

Instead, I would like to take up the other side of the coin. How about all the places we fell short?

These can be divided into two varieties. First, a science fiction writer may miss the boat by working out a plot that involves a successful prediction and then, somehow, never getting around to writing the story. Second, he may actually write a story in which there is a place where a small item is just aching to be inserted—and would be a successful prediction if he did so—and he doesn't insert it.

The first variety is less important, if only because a writer isn't very impressive when he says, "Oh, I thought of writing a story about laser-induced fusion in 1933, but never got around to it."

I wouldn't want to say science fiction writers (who, as a class, are incredibly honorable and trustworthy people) would lie about such things, but memory is always a fallacious thing, and even the best of us tend, in all honesty, to remember matters with advantage.

In my case, however, I keep a diary, and somewhere in the very early 1940s (the exact statistics are given in my autobiography), I noted the fact that I was thinking of writing a story about a very small, dense star with a life-bearing planet that circled it in two minutes. In other words, I was going to talk about a neutron star a quarter-century before any had actually been detected—except that I never wrote the story.

Then, in 1942, I actually started a story called "The Camel's Back." It dealt with an extremely massive star that was heading in the direction of the Solar system, where it would set up tidal effects that would surely disrupt Earth's orbit and ruin it as an abode for life. However, the star was collecting

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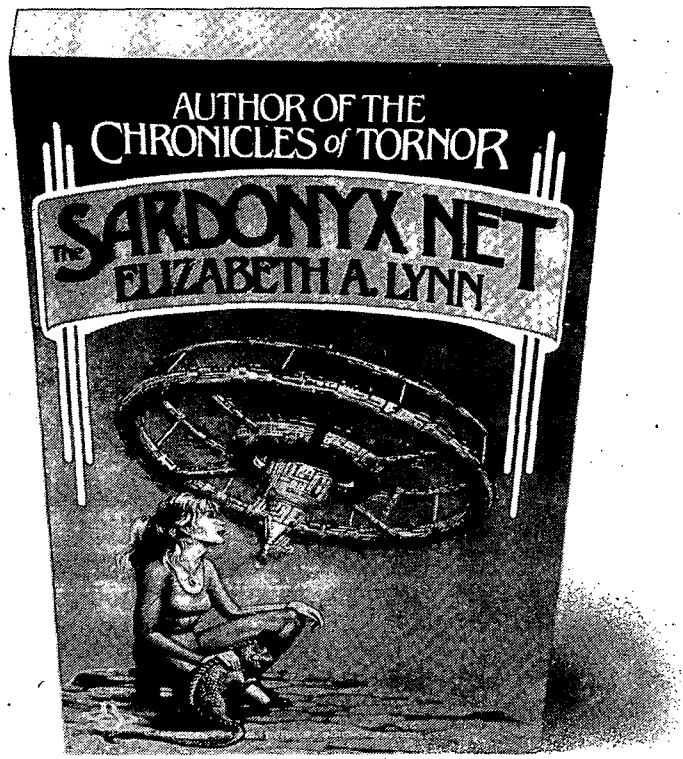

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space debris as it came and was getting continually more massive. The additional mass was very slight compared to its total mass, but only a very slight additional mass was required to push the star over the line into collapse into a black hole. (The additional mass was "the straw that broke the camel's back"; hence the title.)

I never finished the story, so I missed the chance of talking about black holes decades before any scientist did; but on the other hand, I was under the distinct impression at the time that gravitons couldn't get out of a black hole any more than photons could. That meant that *my* variety of black hole would have no perceptible gravitational field, and the solar system would, therefore, be saved. Maybe it's just as well I didn't finish the story.

Let's take up the second variety of boat-missing: the one in which you actually publish a story and miss something that would have been beautiful, if only you had been smart enough to think of it.

I've managed that, too, and the case that is, to me, the most frustrating and tooth-grinding one is to be found in my story "The Martian Way" (a very good story, on the whole), which was first published in the November 1952 issue of *Galaxy*.

In it, I had a group of Martian colonists (Earthmen by descent, of course) take the long journey to Saturn. They got there safely, and, in the process, I described a space-walk very accurately about fifteen years before such things took place.

Eventually, they reached the neighborhood of Saturn, and here's how I described it:

"Saturn filled half the sky, streaked with orange, the night shadow cutting it fuzzily nearly one-quarter of the way in from the right. Two round little dots in the brightness were shadows of two of the moons. To the left and behind him . . . was the white diamond of the Sun.

"Most of all he liked to watch the rings. At the left, they emerged from behind Saturn, a tight, bright triple band of orange light. At the right, their beginnings were hidden in the night shadow, but showed up closer and broader. They widened as they came, like the flare of a horn, growing hazier as they approached, until, while the eye followed them, they seemed to fill the sky and lose themselves.

"[Near them] . . . the rings broke up and assumed their true identity as a phenomenal cluster of solid fragments rather than the tight, solid band of light they seemed.

"Below him, or rather in the direction his feet pointed, some twenty miles away, was one of the ring fragments. It looked

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like a large irregular splotch, marring the symmetry of space, three-quarters in brightness and the night shadow cutting it like a knife. Other fragments were farther off, sparkling like star-dust, dimmer and thicker, until, as you followed them down, they became rings once more."

There you are. It's quite correct as far as it goes, but it doesn't go far enough. Did I have to accept the appearance of Saturn's rings at close-quarters as identical to the way we see them from Earth, which is over a billion kilometers away? Might I not have supposed that at that distance, even with the best telescope, we would miss some of the finer details?

I could easily have imagined that the rings would be composed of particles of different gradations of properties and that there would be processes that would sort them out. In moving rapidly about Saturn these particles—of different size, of different composition, of different shape, or whatever—would set up a panorama of circles, distinct in appearance, so that the rings would seem to consist of ringlets, thousands of them. I could have described the rings as filled with intense symmetrical detail. My goodness, would it have been so strange to have expected all sorts of detail to be visible close-up that would not be visible from Earth? Wouldn't I have expected the surface of our Moon to have been littered with small craters, even tiny ones, and not have described that surface as possessing only those craters large enough to see from Earth?

To be sure, there were no astronomers who caught this fact about Saturn's rings, but that's no excuse. I'm not an astronomer; I'm a science fiction writer; and I should, therefore, have more vision than an astronomer does.

If I had only managed to do it. Then, once Voyagers I and II had sent back their photos, I could have announced my vision of thirty years before and have insisted on full credit for being a generation ahead of my time. But I didn't, so I couldn't. I was just too stupid, and I'll never get over it.

There is one way, however, in which I might retrieve the situation. Surely I can't be the only writer who has managed to avoid immortality. There must be others who have been grinding their teeth.

Well, I'm not going to try to find such cases, but here is a challenge to the readers. Perhaps *you* can find cases. If you can, and if you send them in, and if I think they are good examples, I will mention them, now and then, somewhere in the magazine, and include your name, correctly spelled. I'll even send each one who succeeds a personal check for five dollars.

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Naturally, there are some rules:

1) Don't look through the stories in this magazine or other contemporaries. You can't really judge whether someone has missed the boat so close to the present. The story in question must have appeared prior to 1960, so if you're citing a case, please include the magazine issue (or book copyright) of first appearance.

2) For goodness sakes, don't look for mistakes. We are not in search of errors of fact (we all make them, and sometimes they're just oversights or misprints) or even errors of prediction. We're looking for a setup where an *accurate* prediction

---

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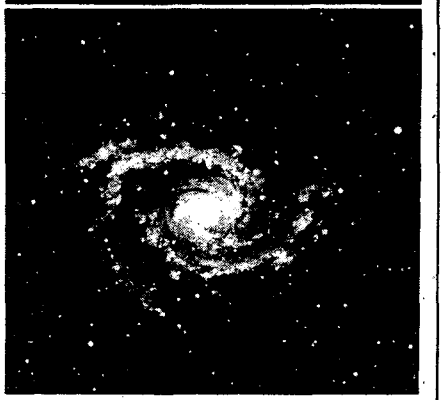

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could easily have been made but wasn't, as in my own case.

3) Choose a case where the *accurate* prediction would really have been possible by fair assumptions or reasoning, as in my case. Lester del Rey, decades before the fact, casually referred to the surname of the first man reaching the Moon as Armstrong, but he got the first name wrong. Well, there's no process of fair reasoning that would have given him the correct first name, so that doesn't count.

4) Finally, please include a word-by-word passage that will show exactly where the prediction was missed. Make the passage as short as possible. (We don't want copyright trouble. I could have made my own passage considerably shorter than it was, for instance, but I don't expect to sue myself for unauthorized quoting, you see.) Anything outside the passage that has to be explained—please explain. And address them to "Isaac Asimov, Quotations" so that Kathleen and Shawna don't have to be bothered with them.

Go ahead, then. Even if you don't find anything, it will be no loss. You'll get a chance to reread some old stories, and that might be fun—as long as you don't neglect to read the new stories in this magazine, of course. ●

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ON BOOKS

by Baird Searles

Majipoor Chronicles
By Robert Silverberg
Arbor House, $12.95 (cloth); $5.95 (paper).

Robert Silverberg's planet Majipoor is a big place, as we found out in *Lord Valentine's Castle*. Its surface area is huge; much of it is covered by seas, but the three continents still have a land area larger than Earth's. Its population is numbered in the tens of billions.

So despite the sweep of *Lord Valentine's Castle,* there is plenty of room for the chronicling of events on Majipoor; therefore, Silverberg has given us the *Majipoor Chronicles*. The stories are in chronological order, dating back to what is nearly prehistory for Valentine's time, that period when humanity is just beginning to fill the vast territories of the planet, shouldering aside the native metamorphs. Other alien races of the Galaxy are also beginning to filter in.

There are eleven stories, the eleventh of which is really the culmination of the linking device that Silverberg has used to tie them all together.

This "device" is Hissune, an urchin of the Labyrinth (whom we met in *Lord Valentine . . .*) dipping into the "memory recordings" of the Register of Souls. The stories are those recordings.

In "Thesme and the Ghayrog," Silverberg has extended a situation common in our own time. A jaded young woman has an affair with an alien, both to shock her friends and to allay the guilt she feels for what she thinks is society's prejudice but which is, of course, really her own. "The Time of the Burning" concerns an incident in the Metamorph Wars, and "In the Fifth Year of the Voyage" is something of an adventure story about an attempt to cross the huge ocean that covers one entire hemisphere of Majipoor.

"The Soul-Painter and the Shapeshifter" is another familiar theme that has been Majipoorized—the great painter who paints and falls in love with a subject entirely out of his sphere of experience. Despite the exotic trappings (he paints with his mind on psychosensitive fabric; she is a native Metamorph), it could be Gainsborough and the gypsy girl who

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returns to her own people in the end.

My favorite of the lot is "A Thief in Ni-moya," a Cinderella story in which a provincial shopkeeper rises from rags (or if not rags, certainly Majipoverty) to riches. Its clichés are satisfyingly freshened by Silverberg's inventive details and milieu.

Majipoor Chronicles, like *Lord Valentine's Castle,* is in the new "Baroque" SF tradition, giving us a romantic, almost Medieval quality of fantasy firmly based on a science-fictional premise. My major reservation about the short stories is that perhaps Silverberg has thrown out the baby with the bath water; he has strayed beyond fantasy into fairy tale and fable with simple, easy plotting and situation. (This is true only of some, however, and certainly not of the previous novel.) Perhaps a bit of backtracking to the necessary logic and "realism" of the best SF (and fantasy) might be in order.

Nonetheless, I was happy to visit Majipoor again, and glad to know there's room on that great and grand world for even more events to be chronicled.

The Rape of the Sun
By Ian Wallace,
DAW Books, $2.95 (paper).

Ian Wallace has tackled quite an idea in *The Rape of the Sun.* Dhurk, military officer of the planet Dhorn, loves the High Priestess Hreda. Her grandfather, ruler of the planet, indicates that Hreda will marry Dhurk if he brings her what she most desires: a *ladiolis,* an object of great religious significance, for her temple museum. A *ladiolis* is a sun, and Dhurk decides to bring her ours, complete with planetary system. Since it seems a shade unwieldy, Dhurk decides that the best *modus operandi* is to shrink the entire system.

In the meantime on Earth, a group of scientists has been engaged in a project aimed at tapping the sun's energy by setting up gathering and beaming devices inside the orbit of Mercury. When they realize that the Solar System is, in fact, diminishing and when they find out the reason for it, they decide to confront the Dhorner ship and prevent the theft of the Sun.

The translation of this idea into a novel that isn't just plain silly would take some doing, and unfortunately, Wallace doesn't. Aside from the very outrageousness of the plot, there are some big problems here. For one, he laces the story with a great deal of technical stuff, well over my tolerance level. Part of the art of science fiction is integrating that kind of thing into the narrative, not stopping it dead.

And then he goes too far in

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the other direction by introducing a mystic as a key plot element, by which the Dhorner scheme is revealed to the Terrans; later, Dhurk finds out in the same way that Hreda loves him only for his sun-moving abilities and is, in fact, just a Sol-digger. Introducing a fantasy element into a hard-core SF novel in this way is not only jarring; it's cheating. A little brain work could have achieved the same plot results a good deal more rationally.

Also off-putting is Wallace's style. He is one of the zippy writers; no one, for instance, ever just says anything. Dialogue is "ejaculated," or "enunciated," or "thin-smiled." On the positive side, he has created an interesting culture in Dhorn, which has evolved in a medium that shares the properties of a gas and a liquid. It's too bad it wasn't used in the service of a more worthy vehicle.

The Gardens of Delight
By Ian Watson
Timescape, $2.50 (paper).

The Ians Wallace and Watson tend to run together in the minds of those who haven't read them; the coincidence of their each having a new novel gives the opportunity to sort them out.

Watson's latest, *The Gardens of Delight,* is a very complicated novel (maybe too complicated) built around a very simple premise (maybe too simple). The premise is one of those "What about a planet based on . . ." ideas—in this case a painting, the Hieronymus Bosch triptych that bears the same name as the novel. In case your art history courses are far behind you, the triptych is a fifteenth-century nightmare, a surrealist landscape of giant ears, mythical beasts, oversized birds, perambulating fish, and a cast of thousands. Watson's planet looks just like it, and like it, it is divided into three parts: The Garden of Delights, Eden, and Hell.

The game, of course, is to justify this conceit, and the protagonists, human colonists who have just landed in this Medieval Disneyland, spend most of the book trying to find that justification. (As one of them points out, the place can't have been settled by bio-manipulating art historians.) In the process, they are killed, translated to Hell, swallowed by a demon and eliminated (graphically) into Eden; everywhere they are told that the Being responsible for all of this is God.

The complication isn't in the plot; that is a fairly straightforward odyssey through the various Bosch landscapes. It is in the endless speculation that the author provides on the way. First, given the reference to God, the speculation is theological/metaphysical; then, given

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the solution (to put it much too simply, a playful super race), it is arcanely physical, with pages of material on the order of: "A collapsing ellipsoid mass rotating rapidly about its long axis will shrink, not to a pointlike singularity within an event horizon, but to a threadlike singularity that is *naked* to the manifest universe." I can take only so much of that before my eyes glaze over.

Perhaps there are those out there who will enjoy this kind of intellectual playfulness. In any case, this denouement-justification of advanced scientific jargon is in marked contrast to the Alice-In-Wonderland surrealism of the body of the novel. The two don't mesh; again, there's an attempt to mix fantasy and SF that just doesn't work. But *The Gardens of Delight* certainly deserves an A for effort.

Heroes of Zara Keep
By Guy Gregory
Bantam, $2.50 (paper).

After the pretensions, complications, and genre confusions of Watson and Wallace, Guy Gregory's *Heroes of Zara Keep* is something of a relief, since it is nothing more than what it purports to be: a simple, straightforward fantasy.

Five young people, all at the point of violent death by fire, drowning, etc., are suddenly brought into another world by Fulmin, a wizard straight from Central Casting. He needs their help in besting the evil men of Zara Keep, a citadel built by strange beings who then abandoned it. Their former servants have now taken over the keep and the magic left behind in it. The five must must capture a Crystal that is the key to that magic.

The quest and penetration of Zara Keep are pretty predictable, but it's a comfortable sort of predictableness, decorated and enlivened by some original characters and events. There's a paternal giant they meet in the dungeons, and in their exploration of the Keep, they use such unlikely ways and means as an automatic garbage truck, thermal ducts, and a hydraulic elevator.

The five "heroes" are a varied and appealing lot (not, for a change, the alienated neurotics who have been so popular lately), as are the odd personages from whom they learn the skills needed for their task. My major criticism about the novel is the spareness of the prose, reminiscent of Alan Garner's later work. We are given little information about the alien world, its history, or the strange events that have led to the current situation.

A word for the cover of *Heroes of Zara Keep*. It shows the five realistically, grouped before a rocky landscape with enormous

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waterfall. Just barely discernible are the misty Keep and an infinitesimal silhouette of a winged creature bearing a rider. It is strikingly different from the current run of fantasy covers, and highly evocative. No artist is credited.

Roderick: The Education of a Young Machine, Vol. I
By John Sladek
Timescape, $2.75 (paper).

John Sladek's *Roderick* is an artificial intelligence, a self-aware computer if you will, whose creation at an obscure Midwestern university was almost an accident. The project responsible for his genesis was in reality a screen for the embezzlement of funds by a high-ranking NASA official in order to enlarge his collection of vintage airplanes.

When word of Roderick's existence leaks out, he is in danger of elimination by another government agency, which has formulated various scenarios for disaster in the "birth" of a man-made being. He is given a body resembling a toy tank and spirited away to an ecologically-minded California couple, where his formative period is spent watching a lot of television.

He is then adopted by a Midwestern couple (who regard him as a person) and subjected to various disasters, such as being kidnapped by Gypsies and attending school, both public and parochial, where he is regarded as a little boy with a handicap.

As is probably evident from this precis, though I've tried to be straightforward about it, Mr. Sladek has attempted a broadly satirical novel, the success of which may simply depend on how amusing the reader finds it. For my part, I found that the author too often beats a dead horse; his targets, the American university, California, the Midwest, television, public school education, Catholic education, have all been subject to overkill.

Roderick himself, however, is another matter, and things perk up when he finally becomes more than an inarticulate awareness. He is a cam-driven Candide in his sweet and wide-lensed view of the grotesque world in which he finds himself, and I found myself touched by his reactions to the events that outrageous fortune has in store for him.

There is a scene very near the end of this volume that nearly made up for the strain of pushing through some of what went before. In it Roderick proudly takes the part of one of the three wise men in the School Christmas pageant. The chaos that results is one of the few truly funny moments in the history of science fiction.

Roderick's biography will run to two more volumes. I can only

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hope they contain more moments like that one.

The Pillars of Eternity
By Barrington J. Bayley
DAW, $2.25 (paper).

If what you ask for in an SF novel is a good, fast-moving story based on and incorporating some original concepts, Barrington Bayley's *The Pillars of Eternity* fills the bill.

The major character, pseudonymously one Joachim Boaz, is a starship captain ("shipkeeper" in the book's lingo) who, by virtue of starting life as one of the few malformed and crippled individuals in the worlds of the Econosphere, has been refashioned into a new species of human. His skeleton is artificial and chock full of "adp" (automatic data processing). This gives him super powers but also super vulnerability. He is traumatized and nearly killed in a horrible accident involving an alchemic evocation of "ethereal fire"; his doctors go back to the drawing board and restore him, but henceforward he must stay within range of a ship loaded with the support systems that keep him alive.

The author then introduces a planet that wanders eccentrically among the stars of a dense cluster. It has been found and lost once before, and there are hints that it contains artifacts of an ancient race that may involve time travel. The major philosophy of Boaz's time believes that the universe repeats itself through eternity; given the transcendent pain he has suffered, Boaz decides to do nothing less than change eternity.

As you can see, Bayley packs a lot into this relatively short novel. Despite the complexity, it's pretty superficial stuff; his characters and plot suffer in relation to his cosmic concepts. Nevertheless, it's adequately written, it moves along nicely, and the background is filled in with a colorful and decadent multiworld culture.

They'd Rather be Right
By Mark Clifton & Frank Riley
Starblaze Editions, $4.95 (paper).

A minor SF mystery of the past two decades has been why the Hugo-award winning novel of 1955 has not been available (it last saw print in 1959). It has finally been reprinted, and I'm afraid the answer is now obvious. It's not very good.

Let me amend that: it is dated. With due respect to the membership of the World SF Convention for that year, who voted the award, it may have been stimulating at that time. But it *is* very much of its time. It's surprising how many genre novels manage to transcend this, but *They'd Rather Be Right* simply doesn't.

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One major problem is that it has to do with an electronic intelligence as conceived just before computer science began to take off. Thus the major thrust of the book is cast in the framework of cybernetics, which now gives it a downright antique flavor.

There are other problems. The authors, after creating their cybernetic mind ("Bossy"), suddenly seem to shy off from the implications and change course. Bossy offers physical and mental rejuvenation, and the rest of the novel occupies itself with the effects of that aspect of the situation.

There are stock characters: the unworldly scientist, the loose-living lady with the 24-carat heart, the old carnival swindler; the ruthless industrialist altruistically intelligent under the flinty exterior. Then there's the telephathic protagonist whose powers and place in the story seem to have little to do with the rest of it. The attitudes are also very much of the 1950s, such as the preoccupation with media manipulation, the power of Madison Avenue, and the responsibility of science for its destructive creations. (These issues are certainly still relevant, but their expression seems almost naïve in the context of our time.)

I can really only recommend *They'd Rather Be Right* for those who absolutely must read every Hugo novel. Otherwise, it is simply a period curiosity.

Recent publications by those connected with this magazine consist of:

Laughing Space: An Anthology of Science Fiction Humor, edited by Isaac Asimov and J.O. Jeppson, Houghton Mifflin, $17.95.

Space Mail. Vol. 2, edited by Isaac Asimov with Martin Harry Greenberg and Charles C. Waugh, Fawcett, $2.50 (paper).

Asimov on Science Fiction by Isaac Asimov, Avon, $2.95 (paper).

Editor's Note

Another book by someone connected with this magazine —our esteemed book reviewer, Baird Searles—is *A Reader's Guide to Fantasy,* by Mr. Searles, Beth Meachem, and Michael Franklin. It's a companion volume to the highly regarded *A Reader's Guide to Science Fiction,* by the same authors plus Martin Last, which was published in 1979. Both books are from Avon and are priced at $2.95. ●

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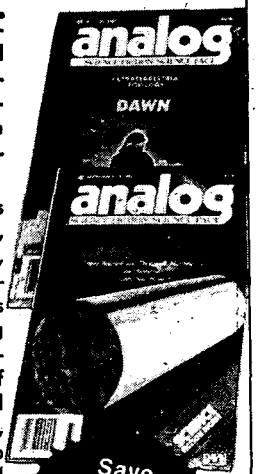

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MARTIN GARDNER

FINGERS AND COLORS ON CHROMO

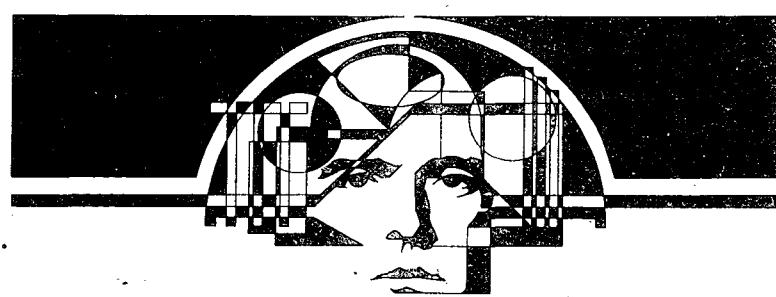
The planet Chromo is inhabited by a not-so-intelligent race of three-eyed humanoids. (We met them earlier in a puzzle that is number 13 of my *Science Fiction Puzzle Tales*.) There are three sub-races on Chromo, one with pink skin, one with blue skin, and one with green skin.

Tourmaline, ruler of the pinks, was planning a state banquet that required the seating of 60 Chromos in one large hall, three to a table.

"Have you decided who sits where?" the ruler asked Coralie, one of her aides. "Remember, all three colors will be represented, and we want to mix the colors as much as possible at each table."

"I understand, your majesty," said Coralie. "I'm still working on the seating plan. No matter how I divide the sixty guests into triplets, at least one person in every triplet must be a pink."

Exactly how many pinks, how many blues, and how many greens are among the guests? See page 48 for the solution.



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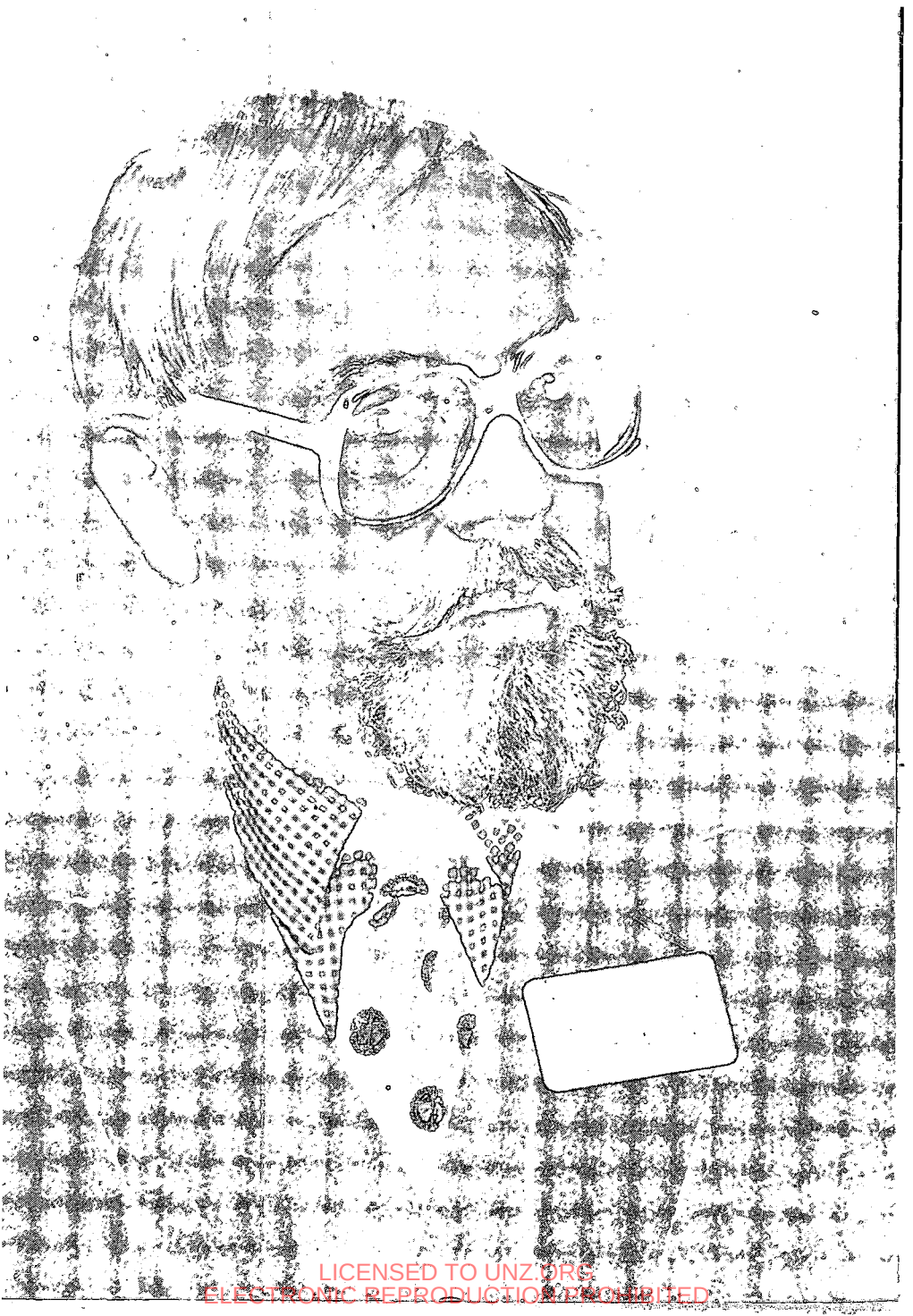

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After 30 years, he's the keeper of the High Tech flame

PROFILE

HARRY HARRISON

by Charles Platt

The young hi-tech hero—armed against adversity with pocket calculator, soldering iron, and a set of socket wrenches—seems dated these days. His language is kind of technical. His little lectures on physics and engineering strain the attention span of readers reared on the rhythms of TV commercials and videogames. Science fiction should have computers in it, for sure, and fancy gadgets and that sort of thing . . . but we don't really have to know how all that stuff works, do we? And we certainly don't want to know about its inconvenient real-life limitations. Thrust aside the daunting complexities of that computer bombsight, Luke; shut your eyes and go with the flow of the Force. It's more dependable than Yankee ingenuity and so much simpler than scientific method.

Technologically accurate adventure fiction isn't dead yet, of course. Semi-comatose, it still survives, mostly in the pages of *Analog*, its birthplace. But Robert

photo: Jay Kay Klein

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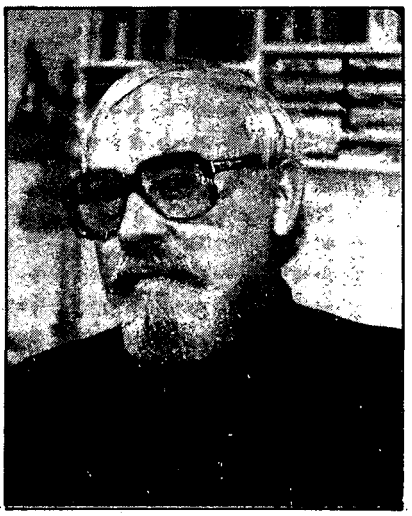

photo: Charles Platt

"We have freedom in this country, but freedom of information is something else altogether. When you're getting nothing but one political attitude all your life, you have no real freedom of choice. And you wonder why they elected Reagan?"

Heinlein, garrulous guardian who nurtured it to maturity, abandoned the form years ago. Many other writers left too, seeking other areas of greater ambition, social relevance, and literary pretension.

And why not? The rewards for careful, accurate science-fiction storytelling were always small. You had to do a lot of research, you were paid a pittance, and the critics ignored you. No matter how well you did it, you were still writing category-fiction that could claim few if any literary virtues; if you took extra trouble to get the science right, that was largely between you and your conscience. The *New York Times Book Review* certainly wouldn't notice.

So it is that Harry Harrison has been relatively rarely reviewed, revered, or even remembered by critics. For Harrison has stayed steadfastly within the technologically oriented, action-packed school of science fiction. That he has exploited its potential more sensitively, intelligently, and

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resourcefully than almost any of his contemporaries has often been overlooked.

Of his twenty-nine novels, he remains best known for *Deathworld* and *The Stainless Steel Rat*, both of which grew into series, and for his most ambitious book, *Make Room, Make Room!*, which was debased into the movie *Soylent Green*. He has been writing science fiction for more than thirty years: methodically, persistently, and, for much of that time, uneconomically. Science fiction in the 1980s can be modestly lucrative, especially for writers who, like Harrison, manage to keep their earlier works in print. But through the 1950s and 1960s, the only way a science fiction writer could make a decent living was by turning out large quantities very fast and (usually) rather sloppily. Or, alternatively, he could treat science fiction as a labor of love and earn his real income by writing other stuff on the side. For many years, Harry Harrison did exactly that.

"I spent ten years writing Flash Gordon, to stay alive," he recalls. "The syndicated strip. Every daily and Sunday for ten years, from 1958 to 1968, every one of those scripts was mine. I also ghost-wrote a lot of stuff. I ghosted comics for Leslie Charteris for years. I wrote for confession magazines; I did 'I was an Iron Lung Baby.' I did men's adventures, such as 'I Went Down in my Submarine,' right through 1957, for a nickel a word—maximum!

"But my science fiction novels have always been novels that I wanted to write. Every single book. That's what's great about science fiction; you can write a book for fun and have it published.

"The *Stainless Steel Rat* books I almost write for money. I sign the contract and think, 'Not another one!' But once I start writing, I sit there laughing and enjoying myself."

Harrison talks in restless, staccato bursts, moving the conversation along as fast as the action in some of his novels. He's a mix of

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PROFILE

contradictions: raconteur and drinking buddy, yet secretly shy; aggressive yet a diehard liberal and devout pacifist. He advocates ground-breaking experiments in fiction, while at the same time his own writing stays true to time-honored techniques. He made his career as a writer, but for the first ten years he worked as an artist:

"I went to art school. I found working in art really tremendous. I did classical painting—easel painting—but then I went into commercial art, because I knew I'd never make a living at fine-art painting. I wasn't that good. But I was pretty first-rate as a comic artist. I broke into comics with Wallace Wood. We were in art school together, and we pencilled and inked together, early stuff. Horror was very big then, Bill Gaines [founder of *Mad* magazine] was doing horror comics, we were doing westerns for him, some horror for him.

"Then I illustrated science fiction magazines. I illustrated for *Galaxy*, I did some book jackets for Gnome Press, I did that mostly for a hobby, I got ten dollars for a drawing, was still making a living off comics. I got to know all the science fiction writers because I was Harry the Artist. I was packaging comics, editing comics, when the putsch came. When the comics went from 680 to 200 titles a month, a lot of artists were walking the streets. It was the end of the world.

"So I started editing pulp magazines. I did *Rocket Stories* and *Sea Stories* and *Private Eye*, and Lester del Rey was doing *Science Fiction Adventures* for the same company. When he left, I took over the magazine. I think I sold my first story around then, in 1951, to Damon Knight. I said, What do you think of this story, Damon? And he gave me a hundred dollars for it.

"But I was still doing other stuff, in New York, to earn a living. I was writing confessions stories, anything, freelance. I used to give an old friend of mine work when I was an editor, and he'd give me work when he was an

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editor. In the old days you had to pass work around; there wasn't much work, so you gave it to your friends. *Nepotism ruled,* you know? I had to get out. I didn't want to be art director—if you're art director, you have to read all the crap in the magazine. And I was tired of writing it, so I got about $200, gave up my job, my wife Joan gave up her job, we had an old Ford Anglia, took that to Mexico, put the baby in the back, one year old. Never came back to New York except on visits."

Harrison has travelled a lot since then, living all over Europe and writing an average of one science fiction novel a year. His first, *Deathworld,* was a deliberate attempt to write a story of nonstop danger and action. It was an instant success, and he followed it with several more in the same vein.

"I did *Deathworld* about seven or eight times in various ways. Once I got the formula right, I disguised it with different kinds of titles. *Deathworld* had worked. I knew I could make money off that formula.

"But in the end I had to get out of the routine, so I wrote *Bill, the Galactic Hero.*"

This, Harrison's comic novel satirizing many of the storytelling traditions of science fiction, was rejected by Berkley, the first publisher Harrison submitted it to:

"I gave Damon Knight, who was reading for Berkley Books, a couple of chapters and an outline with some vague idea of where it would go. I thought he'd give me like $1500, $750 of that on signing the contract. But when it came in, he bounced it, saying, 'It's an OK book, but you made a mistake. It's an action novel. Go through it and take out the jokes.' " Harrison rolls his eyes in despair at the memory. "So I submitted it to Doubleday, and they bought it. But it was very heart-stopping for a while there; I feared all along that I'd written a book that no one wanted, and for a while it seemed I was right. I got so shocked that I went back to doing *Deathworld* again, or something like it, and built up slowly to the work it would

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take to get *Make Room, Make Room!* done."

In that novel, written at a time when few people took overpopulation very seriously, Harrison projected as carefully and thoroughly as possible the future effects of an uncontrolled birth rate. The job took five years, and he has not attempted anything as challenging since.

However, even his lighter novels are scrupulous in their use of science and technology, sufficiently accurate to placate the most nit-picking engineer. Also, there is often an underlying political or social message.

Where messages are concerned, Harrison seems to be the only high-tech science fiction writer who espouses a left-wing ideology, as opposed to the conservatism of Heinlein, Pournelle, Niven, or Bova.

"Well, most engineers *are* pretty right-wing, but being right-wing is just a native American fashion. We always had it. We've also had native American socialism. We almost had a socialist president—Eugene Debs was two million votes from being elected President. That's what frightened the far right in America, who gave us what we have now: no liberal press, no liberal thought, and a disaster like the present president. Oh, you'll say there are a few liberal outlets around, but say you live in a small town in Texas. You get a Hearst paper in the morning, a Hearst paper at night, a Hearst TV station; and if that's not enough, you can read *Time* and *Newsweek*. What do you know about nine-tenths of the world? Americans are just as uninformed as *Pravda* readers in Russia, from the opposite point of view. We have freedom in this country—no one's denying that—but freedom of information is something else altogether. When you're getting nothing but one political attitude all your life, you have no real freedom of choice. And you wonder why they elected Reagan?"

Harrison himself has settled outside his native America, in

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Ireland. "I very rarely go to science fiction conventions. I never do the big hoo-hoo and the big ha-ha. They don't know that I'm alive, that little clique that wins those bought-and-paid-for prizes like the Hugo and Nebula. I'm not part of it; *Skyfall*, a book of mine that sold a quarter of a million copies—they printed about 350,000 and actually sold a quarter of a million—never received one nomination for a Hugo or a Nebula. So I have a strong suspicion that someone's buying and reading, but someone else altogether is nominating.

"The Hugo and Nebula mean a lot as far as money goes, if you mention them on a book cover. But one award—I won't tell you which—I really have seen won by ballot-box stuffing. But we really don't want to go into print about Nebulas and Hugos, do we? I mean are they important in the world? They're no different from, say, the Oscars, which are also bought and paid for—they must be, if really rotten

photo: Jay Kay Klein

"The Hugo and Nebula mean a lot as far as money goes, if you mention them on a book cover. But one award—I won't tell you which—I really have seen won by ballot-box stuffing."

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pictures like *The Deer Hunter* win and good pictures are ignored. Something rotten always wins awards; which is why Brian Aldiss and I founded the Campbell Award. It's voted by a handful of people who have critical, writing, or editing experience, enjoy science fiction, and also have experience of literature outside of science fiction."

I mention that some people regard the Campbell award as being cliqueish.

"It's no more cliqueish than a Nobel Prize. We have one judge in Sweden, two in England, one in Ireland, one in Germany, three or four in the United States. For six months we correspond intensely, and then we use the Australian system to vote. Where's the clique? If anything, it's the direct opposite. What does Tom Shippey have in common with Jim Gunn? And Kingsley Amis is a new judge. That's a clique? Come on, now."

Judges of the Campbell Award have also been criticized for picking books that editor John W. Campbell, after whom the award was named, would have found unreadably modern. It seems odd that Harrison, who sold most of his early work to Campbell's magazine, should continue to write straightforward storytelling himself, at the same time that he advocates breaking the old storytelling rules. Of the "new wave" of the sixties, he remarks,

"I could never write that kind of thing. I couldn't afford to write it. I am a slow writer, which means I have to be a commercial writer. If I'm only doing one book a year, I can't afford to have that book not sell. So as a writer I have a specifically defined area that I can work in. As a reader and an editor I have a much larger one."

And as a reader, he is not satisfied by much of the science fiction currently being published.

"I think it's pretty rotten for the most part. Badly written, completely derivative, digging out old plots—rewriting Edgar Rice Burroughs, if it's possible. And this whole new move to fantasy; it's so easy to write fantasy. You're not

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really writing science fiction when you take a world so far in the future that it's completely isolated from everything we know.

"I love female writers, I always try to anthologize women who write, some really fantastic people like Kate Wilhelm and Kit Reed and Sonya Dorman, but they don't write enough. So instead we have dreamsnakes and dragons, that kind of stuff. You've read it, or at least you've held it in your hand. Have you ever read one? All the way through? Hmm, strong fellow!

"Not too long ago I was on television in Britain with four or five writers, one of whom shall be nameless, and people were saying how wonderful he was and I was sitting there, very quiet. Then someone read the jacket copy of his book, and it said, 'More ideas than in six other science fiction novels.' And I said—'Yes, *all* the ideas *taken from* six other science fiction novels.' So now he's not talking to me any more. But you know you get a little fed up after a while. You pick up a book and you read the first chapter, and you know what's going to happen. The writer's fairly incompetent, can't handle the English language at all. Juvenile, puerile, repetitious—95 percent are that way."

Does he think that there must be good manuscripts that are not being bought by editors for some reason?

"*Everything's* being bought. That's the worst part of it. I was so glad when science fiction expanded, I thought there'd be so much more printed, and a residual amount of good stuff would be there. But now that it's expanded, it turns out nothing residual is any good. The new writers coming in don't seem to know how to write at all. And by new writers I don't mean people like Tom Disch, who is still referred to as 'new' even though he's been around for fifteen years. Who's come along since him? Very few of any consequence."

I ask what Harrison's own ambitions were, when he was a new writer himself, starting out. Looking back, he seems to come to the conclusion that

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PROFILE

ambition never really came into the picture. It was more a matter of surviving on a day-to-day basis.

"I was born in Stamford, Connecticut, in 1925. When I was two years old I moved to New York. My father was a printer, stone broke during the Depression, moving house in midnight flits every three months, beans-and-tea, all that kind of thing.

"My generation was a draftee generation. We knew the second we turned eighteen, we'd be in the army. I went in in 1943, and we didn't even know if we'd win the war or not. So we never looked ahead. You saw it coming, a sort of a feeling of doom. You never really thought where you were going to go, except stay alive; get through high school and a week later you're in the army.

"When I came out of the army, I was happy to be alive, but it was a tremendous thing to readjust to civilian life. It wasn't a matter of ambition; it was just staying alive again. People forget, you know, the shell-shock from the war. A lot of guys became alcoholics, couldn't readjust. You're shaped by the army, that horrible, stupid institution. I couldn't even read. I finally worked down to the *Daily News*—I couldn't read anything more complicated—and then one day I found I couldn't even read that. Well, if you're in an emotional position where you can't read the *Daily News*, you've got trouble, buddy!

"I worked out of it, you know: drank a bit more, the usual solutions you go through. Nobody could afford shrinks in those days. I went to art school, became a comics artist. That field was pretty cheap, though, so it was still a matter of staying alive. But I experienced the joys of reading science fiction and meeting the writers and the artists and the editors in the field, the bunch of drunkards.

"I never had any big ambitions except to stay alive as an artist rather than have a job. I loathed jobs. Mild aims. Staying alive with a family is enough, without high-flown literary ambitions. Yes, you want your novels to be accepted; you want Book-

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of-the-Month Club. But also, being a science fiction writer, you're always being knocked down. My novel *Captive Universe* went through three

> "I never had any big ambitions except to stay alive as an artist rather than have a job. I loathed jobs. Mild aims. Staying alive with a family is enough, without high-flown literary ambitions."

editors at Book-of-the-Month Club. One of them loved the book; the other said, 'Yeah, we'll take it I guess.' And the last one said, 'It's science fiction. We can't take it.' Two months later they took *The Andromeda Strain*, packaged as being 'not science fiction.' You get enough experiences like that, you expect no justice.

"I've written books that tried to get out of the field, like *The Technicolor Time Machine*, which almost got out of it. Every fourth or fifth book I take a deep breath and write one that can bridge—and no one notices it. With *Make Room, Make Room!* I tried to get out, and Doubleday said, 'No, Harry. If we do it as a straight novel, we'll sell three hundred copies.' They wouldn't have promoted it or anything. I sold it to the films years later by accident. There was a lawyer who wanted to buy it, and once he bought it he sold it to MGM for a dollar—he was fronting for MGM all the time. They don't want to give the author anything. That's the history of film. You think publishing is ruthless; try those swine out there in Hollywood. You have to be just like they are, go for the throat, tear it out, show no mercy!

"Someone once sent me a clipping from some magazine, an interview with George Lucas, saying something like, 'I grew up reading science fiction. I really was a fan of science fiction, but I didn't like things written by people like Heinlein or Bradbury. I thought Harry Harrison was my god, and I enjoyed everything he wrote.' That kind of thing. I thought, 'Well! Why the hell didn't you write

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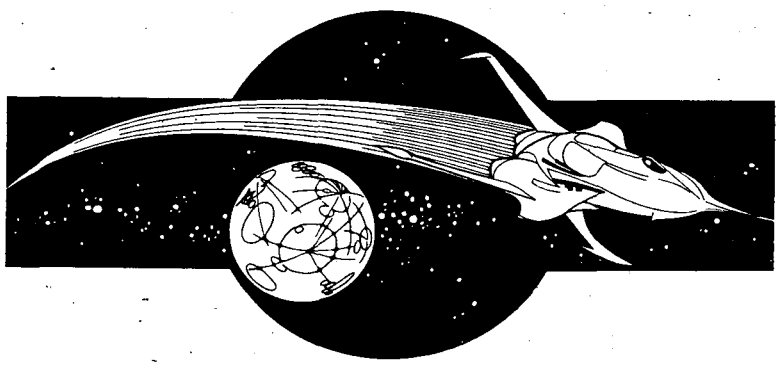
to me and have me do a script for you? If *that's* what you feel, *old son,* I'd be very happy to come over and make some money from this rotten field.' Oh, there's no justice in this field.

"But I earn a living in it. I live abroad, I have all my novels in print in English—all thirty of them—and in 21 other languages as well. I get a lot of reversions of rights and sell them again. My kids are growing up; the financial pressures get less. I was screwed blind a couple of times—we've all been screwed blind by publishers—but they can't screw me any more. Films screwed me once but can't screw me again. And I'm making a living at it. I'm not going to suffer over it, you know. I'm not going to fall into the syndrome of another of our friends who spends his time worrying about money he didn't earn. Eat, drink, and be merry." ●

Charles Platt, formerly editor of *New Worlds,* an influential English SF magazine of the late '60s and early '70s, now resides in New York City. He is the author of *Dream Makers* (Berkley, 1980), a volume of profiles of writers of imaginative fiction. The preceding profile will appear in *Dream Makers II,* to be published by Berkley in the spring of 1983.



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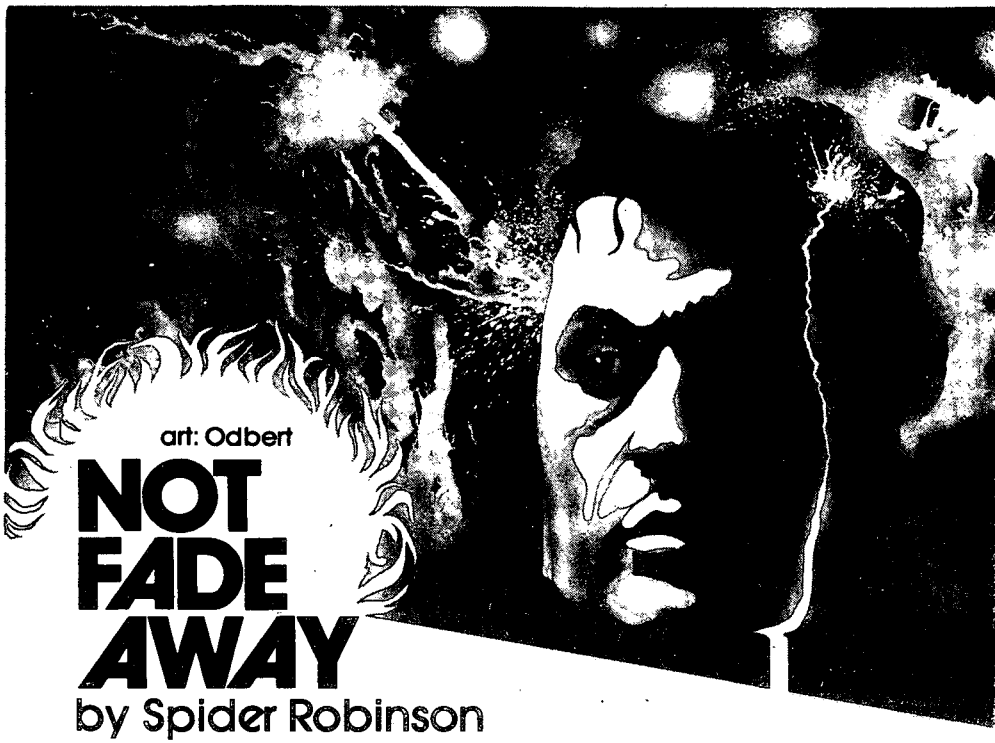

art: Odbert

NOT FADE AWAY

by Spider Robinson

The author is perhaps best known
for his tales of Callahan's Crosstime Saloon.
Or maybe for *Stardance*, his award-winning
collaboration with his wife Jeanne.
Or is it for his review columns,
late of *Analog* and *Destinies* and *Galaxy?*
At any rate, this is his first
appearance in these pages,
and he'd like you all to look
for his new novel, *Mindkiller*,
due out from Holt, Rinehart & Winston this fall.

I became aware of him five parsecs away.

He rode a nickel-iron asteroid of a hundred metric tons as if it were an unruly steed, and he broke off chunks of it and hurled them at the stars, and he howled.

I manifested at the outer periphery of his system and waited to be noticed. I'm sure he had been aware of me long before I detected

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him, but he affected not to see me for several weeks, until my light reached him.

I studied him while I waited. There was something distinctly odd about his morphology. After a while I recognized it: he was wearing the original prototype, the body our ancestors wore! I looked closer and realized that it was the only body he had ever worn.

Oh, it had been Balanced and spaceproofed and the skull shielded, of course. But he looked as if when Balancing was discovered, he had been just barely young enough for the process to take. He must have been one of the oldest of the Eldest.

But why keep that ridiculous body configuration? It was hopelessly inefficient, suited only to existence on the surface of fairly large planets, and rather poorly to that. For a normal environment, everything about it was wrong. I saw that he had had the original sensory equipment improved for space conditions, but it was still limited and poorly placed. Everything about the body was laid out bilaterally and unidirectionally, creating a blind side. The engineering was all wrong, the four limbs all severely limited in mobility. Many of the joints were essentially one-directional, simple hinges.

Stranger still, the body was grotesquely, comically overmuscled. Whenever his back happened to be turned to his star, the forty-kilo bits of rock he hurled achieved system escape velocity—yet he was able to keep that asteroid clamped between his great thighs. What individual needs that much strength in free space?

Oddest of all, of course, his mind was sealed.

Apparently totally. I could get no reading at all from him, and I am a very good reader. He must have been completely unplugged from the Bonding, and in all my three thousand years I have met only four such. He must have been as lonely as any of our ancestors ever was. Yet he knew that the Bonding exists, and refused it.

A number of objects were tethered or strapped to his body, all of great age yet showing signs of superb maintenance. It took me several days to identify them all positively as utensils, several more to realize that each was a weapon. It takes time for things to percolate down out of the Race Memory, and the oldest things take the most time. By then he was ready to notice me. He focused one of his howls and directed it to me. He carefully ignored all the part of me that is Bonded, addressing only my individual ego, with great force.

"GO AWAY!"

"Why?" I asked reasonably.

"GO AT ONCE OR I WILL KILL YOU!"

I radiated startled interest. "Really? Why would you do that?"

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"OH, GAAAH . . ."

There was a silence of some hours.

"I will go away," I said at last, "if you will tell me why you want me to."

His volume was lower. "Do you know who I am?"

I laughed. "How could I know? Your mind is sealed."

"I am the last warrior."

"Warrior? Wait now . . . 'warrior.' Must be an old word. 'Warrior.' Oh—*oh*. You kill and destroy. Deliberately. How odd. Are you going to destroy me?"

"I may," he said darkly.

"How might I dissuade you? I do not believe I am old enough to die competently yet, and I have at least one major obligation outstanding."

"Do you lack the courage to flee? Or the wit?"

"I shall attempt to flee if it becomes necessary. But I would not expect to succeed."

"Ah. You fear me."

" 'Fear' . . . no. I recognize the menace you represent. I repeat: how might I dissuade you from ending me? Is there something I can offer you? Access to the Bonding, perhaps?"

This reply was instant. "If I suspect you of *planning* to initiate the Bonding process with me, I will make your death a thing of unending and unspeakable agony."

I projected startlement, then masked it. "What can I do for you, then?"

He laughed. "That's easy. Find me a fair fight. Find me an enemy. If he or she is as strong as me, I will let you go unharmed. If not, I will give you all I own and consecrate my death to you."

"I'm not sure I understand."

"I am the *last* warrior."

"Yes?"

"When I chose my profession, warriors were common, and commonly admired. We killed or destroyed not for personal gain, but to protect a group of non-warriors, or to protect an idea or an ideal."

I emanated confusion. "Against what?".

His answer was days in coming. "Other warriors."

"How did the cycle get started?"

"Primitive men were all warriors. Then there came a time when the average man had to be forced to kill or destroy. Before long, he could no longer be forced. A Balanced human in free space cannot be coerced, only slain. Can you visualize circumstances which would

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impel you to kill?"

"Only with the greatest difficulty," I said. "But you enjoy it? You would find pleasure or value in killing me?"

A week passed. At last he smote his asteroid with his fist, sharply enough to cause rock to fly from its other side. "No. I lied. I will not kill you. What good is a fight you can't lose?"

"Why did you . . 'lie'?"

"In order to frighten you."

"You failed."

"Yes. I know."

"Why did you wish to frighten me?"

"To compel you to my will."

"Hmmm. I believe I see. Then you do urgently wish to locate an enemy. I am baffled. I should have thought a warrior's prime goal to be the elimination of all other warriors."

"No. A warrior's prime goal is to overcome other warriors. I am the greatest warrior that our race has raised up. I have not worked in over five thousand years. There is no one to overcome."

"*Oh.*"

"Do you know what the R-brain is?"

"Wait. It's coming. Oh. I know what the R-brain *was*. The primitive reptile brain from which the human brain evolved."

"And do you know that for a considerable time early humans—true humans—possessed, beneath their sentient brains, a vestigial but powerful R-complex?"

"Of course. The First Great Antinomy."

"I have an R-complex."

I registered shock. "You cannot possibly be old enough."

I could sense his bitter grin before the sight of it crawled to me at lightspeed. "Do you notice anything interesting about this particular star-system?"

I glanced around. "Barring your presence in it, no."

"Consider that planet there. The third."

At first glance it was an utterly ordinary planet, used up like a thousand others in this out-of-the-way sector. But after only a few days I cried out in surprise. "Why . . . its period of rotation is *precisely* one standard day. And its period of revolution seems to approximate a standard year. Do you mean to tell me that that planet is . . . uh . . ."

"Dirt," he agreed. "And that star is Sol."

"And you imply that—"

"Yes. I was born here. On that planet, in fact. At a time when all

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the humans in the universe lived within the confines of this system—and used less than half the planets, at that."

"!!!"

"Do you still wonder that I shun your Bonding?"

"No. To you, with a reptile brain-stem, it must be the ultimate obscenity."

"Defenselessness. Yes."

"A thing which can be neither dominated nor compelled. And which itself will not dominate or compel . . . you must hate us."

"Aye."

"You could be healed. The reptile part of your brain could . . ."

"I could be gelded too. And why not, since none will breed with me? Yet I choose to retain my gonads. And my R-complex."

"I see." I paused in thought. "What prevents you from physically attacking the Bond? I believe you could harm it greatly, perhaps destroy it."

"I repeat, what good is a fight you cannot lose?"

"Oh."

"In the old days . . . there was glory. There was a galaxy to be tamed, empires to be carved out of the sky, mighty enemies to challenge. Once I pulverized a star. With four allies I battled the Ten of Algol, and after two centuries broke them. Then were other sentient races found, in the inner neighboring arm of the galaxy, and I learned the ways of fighting them." He paused. "I was honored in those days. I was one of mankind's saviors." A terrible chuckle. "Do you know anything sorrier than an unemployed savior?"

"And your fellows?"

"One day it was all changed. The brain had evolved. Man's enemies were broken or co-opted. War ended. The cursed Bonding began. At first we fought it as a plague swallowing our charges. But ere long we came to see that it was what they freely chose. Finally there came a day when we had only ourselves to fight."

"And?"

"We fought. Whole systems were laid waste, alliances were made and betrayed, truly frightening energies were released. The rest of mankind withdrew from us and forgot us."

"I can see how this would be."

"Man had no need of us. Man was in harmony with himself, and it was now plain that in all the galaxy there were no competing races. For a long time we had hope that there might lie enemies beyond this galaxy—that we might yet be needed. And so we fought mock-combats, preserving ourselves for our race. We dreamed of

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once again battling to save our species from harm; we dreamed of vindication."

A long pause.

"Then we heard of contact with Bondings of sentient beings from neighboring galaxies. The Unification began. In rage and despair we fell upon each other, and there was a mighty slaughter. There was one last false alarm of hope when the Malign Bonding of the Crab was found." His voice began to tremble with rage. "We waited for your summons. And you . . . and you . . ." Suddenly he screamed. "YOU *CURED* THE BASTARDS!"

"Listen to me," I said. "A neuron is a wonderful thing. But when a billion neurons agree to work together, they become a thing a billion times more wonderful—a brain. A mind. There are as many stars in this galaxy as there are neurons in a single human mind. More than coincidence. The galaxy has *become* a single mind: the Bonding. There are as many galaxies in this universe as there are stars in the average galaxy. Each has, or is developing, its own Bonding. Each of these is a neuron in the Cosmic Mind. One day soon Unification will be complete, and the universe will be intelligent. You can be part of that mind, and share in it."

"*No*," he said emphatically. "If I am part of the Cosmic Mind, then I am part of its primitive subconscious mind. The subconscious is useful only for preservation from outside threat. As your brain evolved beyond your ancestors' subconscious mind, your universal mind has evolved beyond me. There is nothing in the plenum that you need fear." He leaned forward in sudden pain, embraced his asteroid with his arms as well as his legs. I began moving closer to him, not so rapidly as to alarm him if he should look up, but not slowly.

"When we understood this," he said, "we warriors fell upon each other anew. Four centuries ago Jarl and I allied to defeat The One In Red. That left only each other. We made it last as long as we could. It was perhaps the greatest battle ever fought. Jarl was very very good. That was why I saved him for last."

"And you overcame him?"

"Since then I have been alone." He lifted his head quickly and roared at the universe. "Jarl, you son of a bitch, *why didn't you kill me?*" He put his face again to the rock.

I could not tell if he had seen me approaching.

"And in all the years since, you have had no opponent?"

"I tried cloning myself once. Useless. No clone can have my experience and training; the environment which produced me no

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longer exists. What good is a fight you cannot lose?"

I thought for some time, coming ever closer. "Why do you not suicide?"

"What good is a fight you cannot lose?"

I was near now. "Then all these years you have prayed for an enemy?"

"Aye." His voice was despairing.

"Your prayer is answered."

He stiffened. His head came up and he saw me.

"I represent the Bonding of the Crab," I said then. "The cure was imperfect," and I did direct at him a laser.

I was near, but he was quick, and his mirror-shield deflected my bolt even before he could have had time to absorb my words. I followed the laser with other energies, and he dodged, deflected or neutralized them as fast as they could be mounted.

There was an instant's pause then, and I saw a grin begin slowly and spread across his face. He flung his own weapons into space.

"I am delivered," he cried, and then he shifted his mass, throwing his planetoid into a spin. When it lay between us, I thought he had struck it with both feet, for suddenly it was rushing toward me. Of course I avoided it easily—but as it passed, he darted around from behind it, where he had been hidden, and grappled with me physically. He had hurled the rock not with his feet, but with a reaction drive.

Then did I understand why he kept such an ancient body-form, for it was admirably suited to single combat. I had more limbs, but weaker, and one by one my own weapons were torn from me and hurled into the void. Meanwhile mental energies surged against each other from both sides, and space began to writhe around us.

Mentally I was stronger than he, for he had been long alone, and mental muscles can be exercised only on another mind. But his physical power was awesome, and his ferocity a thing incomprehensible to me.

And now I see the end coming. Soon his terrible hands will reach my brain-case and rip it asunder. When this occurs, my body will explode with great force, and we shall both die. He knows this, and in this instant of time before the end, I know what he is doing, beneath his shield where I cannot probe. He is composing his last message for transmission to you, his people, his Bonding. He is warning you of mortal danger. He is telling you where to find his hidden clone samples, where to find the records he has made of everything he knows about combat, how to train his clones to be

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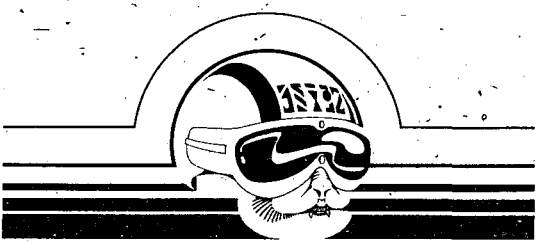
almost as good as he is. And he is feeling the satisfaction of vindication. *I could have told you!* he is saying. *Ye who knew not my worth, who have forgotten me, yet will I save you!*

This is my own last message to you, to the same people, to the same Bonding. It worked. He believes me. I have accomplished what you asked of me. He has the death he craved.

We will die together, he and I.

And that is meet and proper, for I am the last Healer in the cosmos, and now I too am unemployed. ●



MARTIN GARDNER

FINGERS AND COLORS ON CHROMO

(from page 27)

There are 58 pinks, 1 blue, and 1 green. This is easy to prove by trying to find a triplet that will *not* contain a pink. If there are two or more blues, we could put two blues and one green at a table, and thereby contradict Coralie's statement that every possible triplet contains a pink. Similarly, if there are two or more greens. Therefore there can be only one blue and one green.

After dividing the 60 guests into triplets, Coralie found that the hall where they planned to hold the banquet was too small. Two rooms were required. Call them *A* and *B*. At first Coralie planned for 30 guests in each room; then she discovered that room *B* was larger than room *A*.

After looking over the two rooms, Coralie decided to shift just enough guests from *A* to *B* to make 15 more persons in *B* than in *A*. How many guests had to be moved in her seating arrangement?

The surprising answer is on page 117.

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MOONLIGHTING IN THE DAYLIGHT

Why does the Sun shine solely in the daytime
while the Moon is not only visible at night
but sometimes can be seen putting in
a few extra hours in the day?

The Sun possesses the most highly placed
and exalted position in the solar system,
and as such is working on
a straight salaried "no cut" cosmic contract
to shine each and every day
for the better part of 10 billion years.

There are also a few incidental incentive clauses
regarding eclipses, a constant core temperature,
and an 11-year sunspot cycle,
but the Sun's contract is so lucrative
that most legal experts generally regard these
secondary stipulations as superfluous.

The Moon, by celestial contrast,
is not only on a much lower pay scale
(moons being a dime a dozen in the solar system),
but is also compensated at an hourly rate!

To make ends meet in an inflationary economy,
not to mention an ever-expanding universe,
the Moon must resort to picking up
some overtime in the daylight:

Time and a half,
plus a compensatory night off
on the first day of each month.
(Lunar Union Labor Laws).

—Peter Payack

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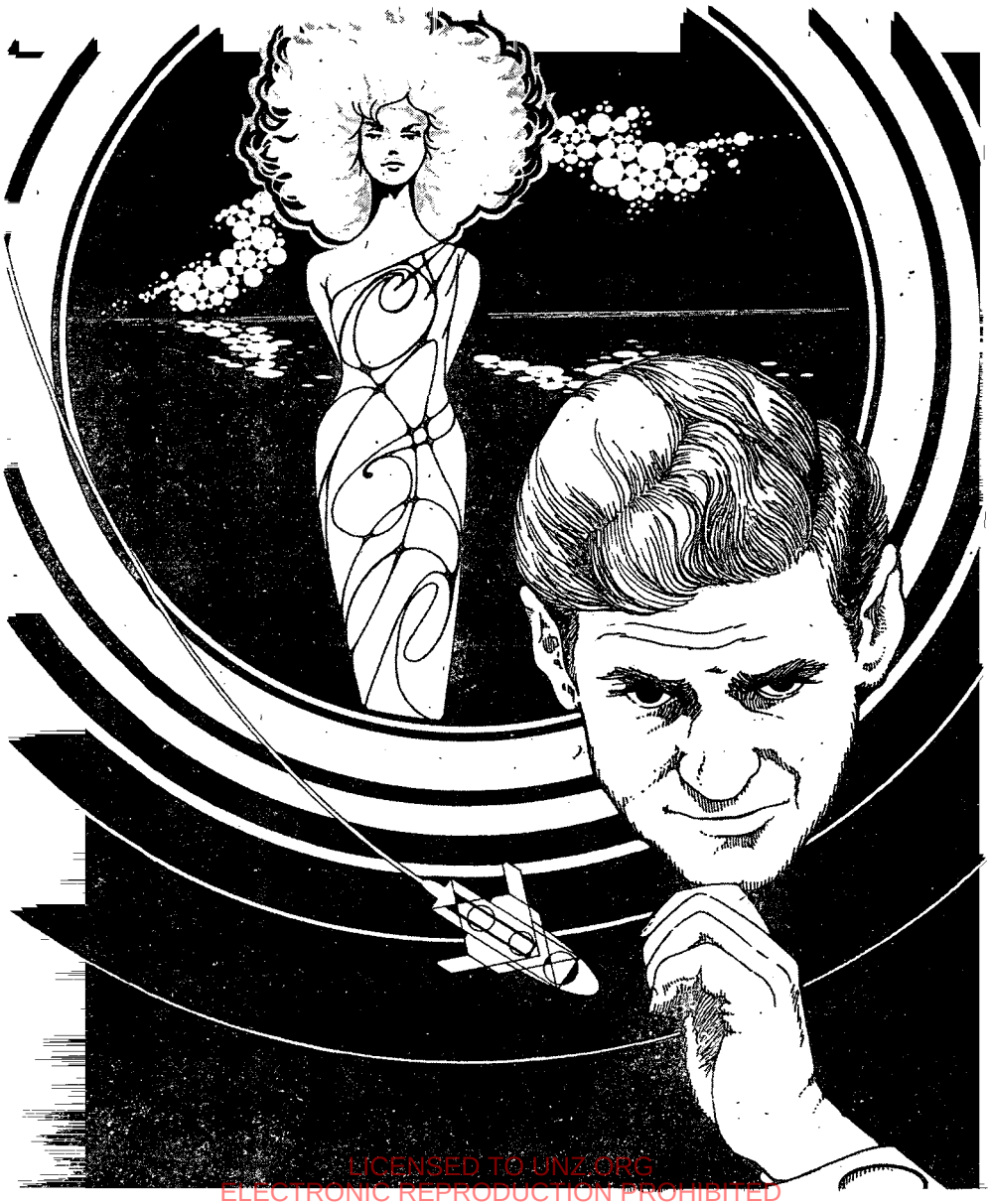

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UNIVERSES

by Robert F. Young

art: James Odbert

The Sage of Silver Creek has sent us another story—quiet and deep. His new novel, The *Last Yggdrasil*, was published in May by Del Rey Books.

Conversation ripples across the posh pavilion where the party is in progress. Nearby, a little inland lake has stolen the stars from the sky. I am an honored guest, and I stand in the midst of admirers listening to the voice of the girl with whom I have just danced. She is like a slender vase with sunflowers in it, and the sunflowers are her hair. The gentian blueness of the vase is the gown which shimmers round her in the soft pulsating light. She is talking lighttalk—the weather, the latest news, a new book she is going to read—and I am listening to her voice as though it were something above and beyond the conversational ripple of which it is a part; as though she were the only girl growing in the garden of girls around me.

It is all a marvel to me—the dance, the night, the sunflower girl. I am like the hero in the Scott Fitzgerald story who had been drunk for years (although I have not been drunk) and who at last with sober eyes finally saw the city again. The world has changed much since I left it and came back, and each aspect of its new face fascinates me. The lilt of the sunflower girl's voice is reassuring; it is like a song I heard often among the stars.

She does not talk lighttalk long; she interrupts the flow of her voice and asks, "Is it all over for you now? Is it past?" And I answer, "Yes, in a way it is," and the interjection creates an eddy and I go round and round in it, and there, almost at my elbow, is the black hole again—the pale accretion disk with with its vivid black-eyed center—and we are falling toward it, Withers, Bannister, the spaceship, and I, caught in its terrible tide. And before my eyes Withers goes mad and hunches down in a corner of the module and clenches his drawn-up legs against his chest with rigid arms, and stares, stares, stares straight before him; and Bannister, insane with panic, suits up, and before I can stop him, jettisons. I blank out.

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"You see," I tell the sunflower girl, whose name is Berenice, "the real problem for me all along has been that I can't remember, and sometimes I think that perhaps I didn't pull the ship free from the tide but that instead we were pulled inside the event horizon and somehow got past the singularity and entered another universe—one very much like the one we left. The possibility haunted me all the way back; and it was bad, because Bannister was dead and I couldn't discuss it with Withers, who, although he wasn't dead, was the same as being dead, and who really would have been dead if I hadn't forced food down his throat."

"But it's all right now, isn't it?" the sunflower girl asks. "You're certain now, aren't you, that you didn't go through the hole."

"No," I say, "I'm less certain every minute."

The orchestra, which is seated on a glittering dais suspended above the dance floor, strikes up an old waltz. Strauss has been resurrected. I find myself on the floor, the sunflower girl in my arms, awhirl to *Artist's Life,* and the music becomes a black hole pulling me back into a past I never knew. And the sunflower girl says, "I'm glad I came tonight, I wasn't going to," and I whisper into her hair, "Yes, I'm glad you came too."

The party is being thrown by Marcus Grenoble, who is a state senator. All of the guests are rich; I am the only pauper present, although I am not truly a pauper any more. I was invited because of my black wings. I am pleased to be present. Like Fitzgerald, I am fascinated by the rich.

The sunflower girl has told me she lives upon a mountain. She must own it, for she says, when the Strauss waltz ends, "My mountain is over two miles high." She has left it temporarily and is staying at the nearby Susquehanna Inn.

I ask to see her home when the party ends, and she says goodnight to the two friends she came with. When I pull into the Inn's semi-circular drive she turns to me and says, "You must come to my mountain and see me. It's called Cold Spring Mountain. Everyone knows where it is."

I ask, "Do you live there all alone?"

"Yes. Right now. I'm returning there tomorrow."

Will it be like Fitzgerald's diamond mountain? I wonder. I have Fitzgerald on my mind. There was a micro-book library on the ship; and on my way back from the black hole, when I wasn't taking care of Withers, I read, read, read. But I know her mountain will not have a huge diamond under it; it will have coal, which is almost the same thing. I say, "I will be there day after tomorrow."

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She leans over and kisses my cheek and says good-night. I am almost certain now that I am in another universe. Were I still in my own she would ask me in for coffee, and afterward we would bed. Yes, another universe, planted with flowers, chief among them a flower of the sun. I do not even remember the drive back to the cheap hotel where I and my memories live.

You see, it could have been this way. Two universes, next to each other, almost but not quite identical, joined together by an Einstein-Rosen Bridge whose temporal distortion constituted an integral part of the juncture. In each universe a NASA on Earth decided to make a manned flyby of a corresponding black hole. In each, the manned ship got too close and was drawn through the event horizon. Each ship then passed into an adjoining universe by way of the Einstein-Rosen Bridge, putting me in my other self's universe and him in mine.

Yes, it could have been that way.

I go to the sunflower girl's mountain. Her castle sits upon its crest. I drive through wild woods, the road climbing ever higher. Her driveway begins halfway up the mountainside; and it is as wide as the road, and winds among disciplined trees. The nascent leaves of the trees are pale green in the morning light. The wild cherry trees have been left untouched, and they are in blossom. They are like little girls standing by the roadside, dressed for school and waiting for the bus.

Up, up, I wind in my synthi-fueled rental-car, and the mountain is like one of Fitzgerald's buildings that his sobered-up drunk finally saw; but it is much, much higher; and in its springtime grandeur far pleasanter to the eye. Up, up, I wind; and there at last before me I see the castle gate; and it opens before me and I find myself in a land of lawns and gardens and hedges and little lakes. And before me the great house rises into the springblue sky, the sunflower of a girl blooming on its portico steps.

We go walking in the afternoon. Among the wild beasts of topiary, through latticed tunnels of rose vines, along paths among elevated parterres that are like the hanging gardens of Babylon. She says, "My father wants to meet you," and I say back, "I thought you were alone." She says, "Yes, but last night I called him in Spain. He will be back by this evening."

"What is your father in?"

She laughs. "In money."

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"Doesn't your mother live here?"

"She's sponsoring an art exhibit in Paris."

"Doesn't she want to meet me too?"

"She doesn't know about you yet; I only called my father."

I point to a distant black mountain. "My grandfather helped turn it black."

"A miner?"

"He said he met the devil once in a mine."

"What did the devil say?"

"He only laughed. But that was in the universe I left."

"You still think you went through the black hole?"

"Yes. I'm certain now. Last night I had a drink in the hotel bar and the barmaid said thanks when I paid her."

"That never happened in Universe Number One?"

"Never once. But both universes are much alike except for certain special things. Like you."

"Am I not in the other one?"

"The other one has pigs for girls."

Her father is an imperious man. He strides into the house like Sardanapalus. He has white hair, which he has let grow all the way down his back. His brow and his jaw are marmoreal. His royal robe is a dark gray suit for which he paid more than my father earned in a year or my grandfather in two. But he is also democratic. He shakes my hand as though he as well as I were common clay. Leonard Lamarche. In money.

In coal.

The coal my father and my grandfather used to mine.

He does not mine it, he transports it. Coal is the way oil once was. He hauls it from colliery to synthi-fuel plant in leviathan copters. He is the Onassis of coal. "I keep their houses warm," he tells me at dinner.

I do not know what the waiter has served me. Pheasant? Perhaps. I do not dare to ask. The dining room is bigger than the house I was brought up in. Lamarche asks, "What was the black hole like?"

"Like the entrance to a mine."

"You saw the singularity?"

"I blanked out when the tide caught us."

"He thinks he went through it to another universe," Berenice says.

Lamarche smiles. "But this is the universe that sent you."

"The other universe could have sent me too."

"I see. But I thought black holes gave into white ones."

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"Only theoretically."

"And this universe is identical to the one you left?"

"For the most part. But there are certain differences."

"Differences that could be the result, could they not, from your long—for us—absence?"

"It could be that way, but I don't think so."

Lamarche asks, "Are you still in the Navy, Commander?"

"I retired. The voyage contributed to my length of service."

"I have a proposition for you then. I need a man with judgment and good sense for my Dispatch Center."

"I don't know," I say.

"Two hundred thousand a year. You can start as soon as you like."

"I don't know," I say again.

"It'll be good for you. And good for me too—I won't deny it. Quid pro quo. The media will love it. Black-Hole Explorer hired by Eastern Coal."

"I will give it serious thought," I say.

I leave the mountain with the sunflower girl's kiss upon my lips. It is truly a Fitzgerald mountain, but I will not let the rich wreck me the way they did him. There is something important I must do. I must go home and visit my folks. I have only greeted them and said goodbye. I owe them more than that.

They live near the mine where my grandfather met the devil. It is a dead mine now. They are so much older than they were that they disconcert me. My father looks old enough to be my grandfather. My mother walks on spindly legs. My younger brother is old enough to be my father. The house they live in, the house I was brought up in, has aged too. It needs paint, and the deck of the back porch is sagging. Some of the roof shingles have blown away. I will fix all these things, but I cannot bring my father back to middle age, nor eliminate my mother's spindly walk.

My boyhood sweetheart has married and has seven kids. The oldest boy is taller than I am. Both of us knew it would be absurd for her to wait. She married my best friend, who is beginning to be an old man.

I do not tell my mother or my father or my brother that I passed through the black hole. They would find this difficult to understand. But I tell them of Lamarche's offer. They are delighted. "Just think," my father says. "My father mined coal and I mined coal. Now my son will transport it."

I will carry it over mountains. I will carry it over hills. I will

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convey it across valleys and over woods. I will transport it to the great synthi-plants that have re-engendered the birth of America. I will warm the people and feed their factories and fuel their cars. I will see to it that the lifeblood of this civilization is never diminished. I will measure up to the standards of this fine universe into which I have found my way.

I return to Cold Spring Mountain and tell Lamarche yes, and he smiles and congratulates me, and the sunflower girl kisses my cheek. Lamarche drives me to another mountain. Atop this one sits not a castle but a large rectangular structure that glitters like a huge oblong diamond. The glitter comes from a thousand windows in three of its walls and from a coping-to-coping skylight in its roof, and it is as bright inside as is the world without.

I stare at the vast room into which Lamarche has escorted me. An entire wall is preëmpted by a computer, and the room is empty otherwise except for a single desk upon which sit a transceiver and four phones and before which sits a wiry, gray-haired man whose eyes are fixed on a large, lighted map in the computer's center.

Lamarche introduces him to me. His name is Reeves. Lamarche then points successively to each phone. "The outside line, the coptruck line, the repair-shop line, the colliery line." He points to the illuminated map. "The stationary white lights are collieries. Each is numbered, and after the number an A or a B indicates whether it is anthracitic or bituminous. The moving numerals you see are coptrucks. Each designated coptruck contains a highly paid crew. If the designating numeral is blue, the coptruck is loaded and on its way to the Eastern Synthi-Fuel Complex. If the light is yellow, the coptruck is empty, and available. When a colliery has a load ready to be picked up, its light will blink. And when a coptruck has mechanical trouble, its light will blink. Your job, Commander, will be to see to it that in the first case the nearest empty coptruck is dispatched to the colliery, and in the second to see to it that the coptruck proceeds at once to the nearest repair-shop branch."

Aerial coal transportation is not new to me. It began long before I left for the black hole. But it had been done by many separate companies. There had as yet been no Onassis on the scene.

I look at Reeves. After his introduction to me his eyes had returned immediately to the map. They are still fixed upon it. "I can't help getting the impression, Mr. Lamarche," I say, "that the job already belongs to Reeves."

"It is his job—and the job, too, of the men on the afternoon and

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midnight shifts. You're the overseer, Commander—the supervisor, if you like. You're where the buck stops. All difficult decisions are to be made by you. Your regular hours will be on the dayshift and you need be present only five days per week; but whoever is on duty can contact you at any time, regardless of where you are, should a real difficulty arise. You will be issued a beeper which you will keep always attached to your belt."

"You had an overseer before?"

Lamarche nods. "My nephew. I moved him up the line."

"I hope I don't disappoint you."

"You won't if you keep this in mind: We move coal. That is all we do. We move it as fast as we can and as cheaply as we can. If one unloaded coptruck is a foot closer to a load-colliery than another, that's the one you send." Lamarche divests his face of seriousness, and smiles. "Besides, how could a man who could escape from a black hole possibly disappoint me?"

I see the accretion disk again, and the abysmal blackness of its center. It is the devil staring with one eye out of hell. He pulls the ship down, down, down through the event horizon; but I elude him and find the Einstein-Rosen Bridge, and walk across it into this fine and shining universe.

Through the windows I can see a culm-black mountain. Smoke is rising from it; it is burning. I remember my grandfather telling me how, long ago, a whole town began to burn from the mines beneath it. Was this true of this universe? I find it hard to believe.

"I'll have to find a place to stay," I tell Lamarche.

"No. No need. I have a house for you in the valley below. Tomorrow you can bring your things and take over."

I do not have many things. The house is a large one, but it is already furnished, and what do I need anyway but the few odds and ends that I have? The house is part of a town, and there is a market just down the street. Not faraway is a colliery. I see many men with black faces. The few I talk to tell me mining pays well. The houses of the town are all large and far apart. They aren't like the houses my great-grandfather told me about. Those houses were high and narrow and inches apart, and sometimes were joined together.

The sunflower girl drives to see me in my new home. There is a party upcoming in the castle, and she invites me. I buy new clothes to wear so she will be proud of me. They seem like cheap miners' clothes in the garden of her guests. She makes me feel at ease. Some of the guests stare at me; but it is the kind of stare reserved for

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celebrities, not miners' sons. I always thought the rich were snobs. These rich aren't. Girls ask me to dance with them. The sunflower girl does not like this. "He's mine," she tells a tall brunette, smiling. The brunette smiles back. "Don't be so selfish, Berenice." I dance with the sunflower girl. It is a fine, fine universe.

I do not make a play for her when she drives me home. In this universe you do not do such things. It is late when we reach the little town beneath the mountain where I live. We sit in the car talking before I go in. I feel her nearness, I want her, but I do not want to make a bathos of our romance. We kiss good-night and she leaves. It is a winsome May night. You can see the mountains rising darkly. You can smell the trees on their slopes. It is a sweet, green smell. You can smell wildflowers too.

I go to work each weekday. I have a small company car which I drive up the winding road to the Center. I have utterly nothing to do. Four men man the phones and the transceiver, their alternating shifts arranged so that each gets one day a week off. I stand and watch. It is a papier-mâché job. A sinecure. But it pays two hundred thousand a year.

I spend my weekends with the sunflower girl. One weekend we go boating. On the river. It is lovely on the river this time of year. We have brought a lunch and eat on the bank. She packed the lunch. There are items of food in it I do not know the names of. My great-grandfather used to live on potatoes. My great-grandmother fixed them all kinds of ways. But maybe in this universe they lived on something else. I wish my great-grandfather were still alive; I would ask him. But he is long dead.

After we finish the picnic lunch the sunflower girl and I spread a blanket and lie down beneath a tree. The river flows past at our feet. I have resolved not to make a play for her, but I cannot help myself. And I can tell she wants me to. I am ravenous after my long voyage. Once free, my passion knows no bounds. She understands how it must be. "Again," she says. "I want you, want you, want you!"

I work monotonous days on my new job, and nights the sunflower girl drives down from her mountain and we make love. I have bought a chair to sit in at work, and I sit in it and stare at the black and burning mountain. The media now refer to me as "The Collapsar Man," and often I have to chase reporters and cameramen away. I ask the sunflower girl if she would like to live with me, but she shakes her head and says no, that then both of us would wind up

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on 3V. But it is fine the way it is: sometimes she arrives early enough to fix dinner, and when she does not she brings dinner in a wicker basket. We make love, and in the morning she drives back to her castle on the mountain.

She invites me to another party. I am not quite the novelty I was before, but girls are glad to dance with me when I ask. I dance infrequently with the sunflower girl, she dances most the night with a tall black-haired man she introduced as Gib Draksen. He is just back from France. It would appear they knew each other before. He is as marvelous a dancer as she, and they do intricate adagios on the floor. I am proud of her, proud that she is such a fine dancer and proud that she loves me. I have driven the company car and she does not need to take me home, and we kiss good-night on the castle steps in the gentle light of a gibbous moon.

I go to visit my folks. I have already initiated repairs upon the house. My father is walking with a cane. I find it hard to believe he is my father. I find it hard to believe he used to crawl around in mines, like my grandfather did, and my great-grandfather before them. I wonder if my father ever saw the devil. If he did he has never said so.

Sometimes I wish that clocks did not radically slow down during velocities approaching that of light. Then I would be old too. Then I would not need to feel foolish when I look at my middle-aged younger brother. But were this true, the black-hole flyby could never have been made.

I return to my house in the valley. I am eager to see the sunflower girl again, even though I have only been away two days. I expect her to drive down to see me, but she does not. I wait for days. Finally I call her, and she says she has been very busy lately and just hasn't been able to get away and that she will come down to see me as soon as she can. I spend my evenings watching 3V.

This morning one of the colliery lights on the illuminated map turns bright red. Colliery 151-A. I call this to the attention of the dispatcher on duty. His name is Benton. "It merely means we should eliminate the colliery from our computations," he tells me. "Something's gone wrong and loused up their production."

"What could have gone wrong?"

He shrugs. "I don't know. It's not our business."

I call the colliery up. The voice that answers is half hysterical. "Cave-in."

"How bad?"

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"Fifty-two men. If we had help we could probably get them out before there's another."

"What about your off-shift men?"

"They're on their way. But the mining town's almost forty miles away and they'll never make it in time. All I've got here is one man and a bunch of goddamn machines!"

I hang up.

I look at the map.

There are four coptrucks within a fifty mile radius of Colliery 151-A. One of them is within ten miles of the mine. Each contains three men.

Three highly-paid men.

Benton is looking at me. I can feel his eyes. I turn slowly from the map. He does not say anything. Instead, I hear Lamarche's voice. "We move coal. That is all we do." Illogically, he adds, "Two hundred thousand a year."

I look back at Benton. "Like you say, it's not our business."

At noon Lamarche calls in and asks for me. Although he does not say so, I know he has heard about the cave-in. "Everything okay up there, Commander?"

"Yes sir," I say.

"No delays, reroutings, holdups of any kind?"

"No sir," I say.

"Good. Stay right with it, Commander."

"Yes sir," I say.

I stand staring at the black and burning mountain. I stand staring at it for a long time. Then I lay my beeper on the desk and walk out.

I drive the company car down the mountain to my house in the valley town. I park it in front of the house and go in and collect the things I brought, pack them and go back outside. I walk to the center of town to the bus terminal and buy a one-way ticket to the town where my mother and father live. When the bus arrives I board it and ride through valleys and around mountains and over hills.

My mother does not question me when I walk into the house. Neither does my father. I call the sunflower girl. I want to explain to her the way it is with me so she will not think ill of me when her father tells her that I quit. The phone rings and rings. At length someone picks it up. A woman's voice says, "Yes?" It must be the voice of one of the maids. "I want to speak to Berenice."

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"You can't right now, sir. She's at her engagement party."

I do not know what I said; but I must have said something, for the voice says, "Mr. Gilbert Draksen."

Soon they will be able, morally, to do intricate adagios in bed.

It comes over the radio that a second cave-in has doomed the fifty-two miners. I go out and sit on the front porch. There is still daylight remaining. You can see a black mountain from our town. There are black mountains throughout the land of coal. They are monuments to human progress. I do not know whether I passed into another universe or not, but if I did, this one is exactly the same as the one I left. The poor are no nobler than the rich, the devil always cuts the deck, and the girls I left behind me are no different from the one I met. ●

PEACE OFFER

(In Reluctant Bow to Age, Reality and the Forever Dragon Hunt)

I once thought to slay all you BAD dragons
and dance in your cold, cindery craws;
(I would hunt you from morn till late at night).
But now I'm content to let you dragons
stay deep down long draws, high-up in crag caves—just
wherever you flame-spouty, burn-'em-outs—(monsters!)
prefer to be when you pout; I'll not rout you
out. Singe-the-bones, flame-'em-ups—you can have
your lives! I'll put away knives, killer-rock slings
and the big-ogre blasters, just for one true-blue small
dragon promise: to respectfully pass always on the far
side The Old Hunter—flames-in, claws-sealed and no bad-mouth spiels
no kill!-kill! vibes, bad-luck spells, or hate-held grudges, either! —Deal?

—David R. Bunch

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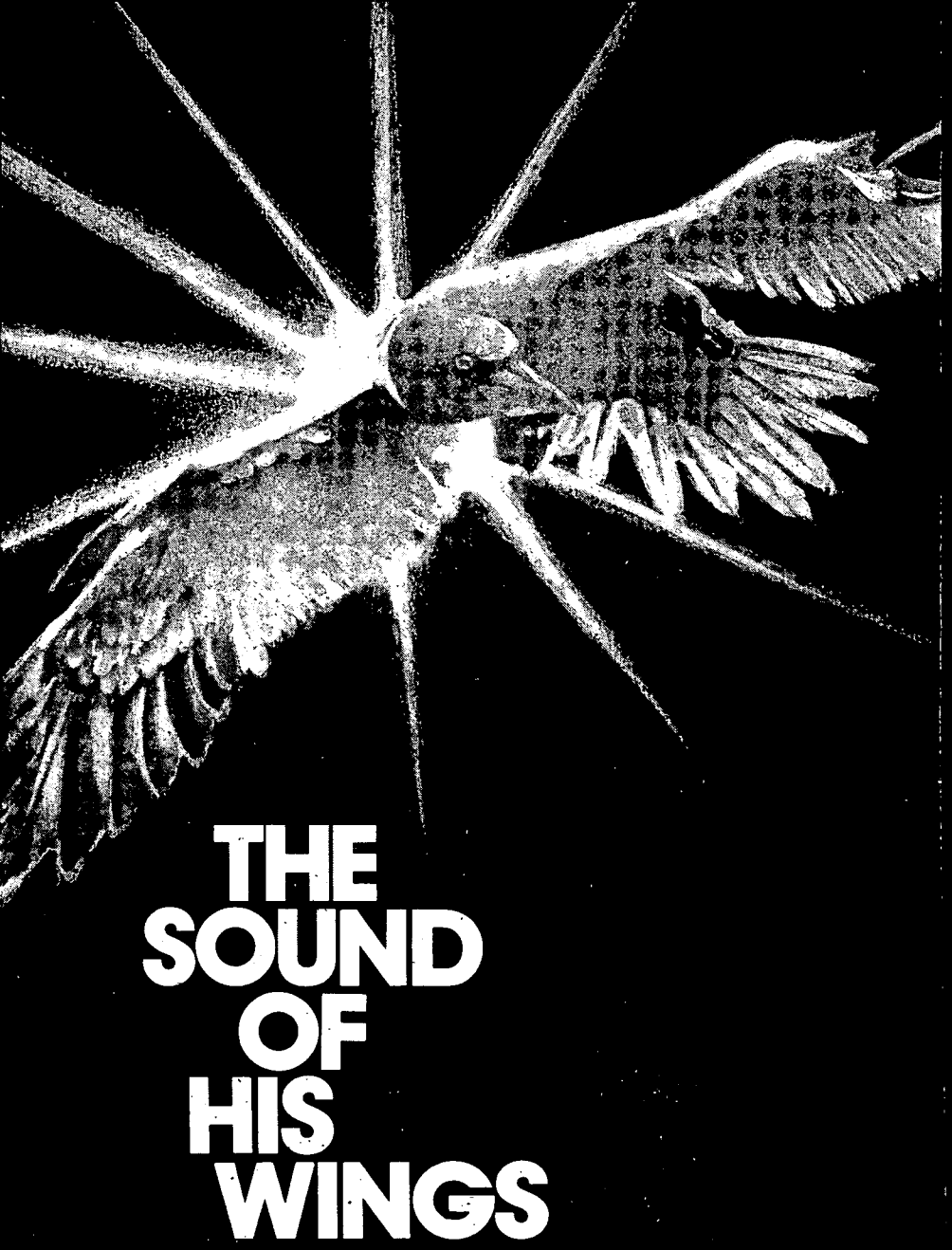

THE SOUND OF HIS WINGS

art: Val Lakey/Artifact

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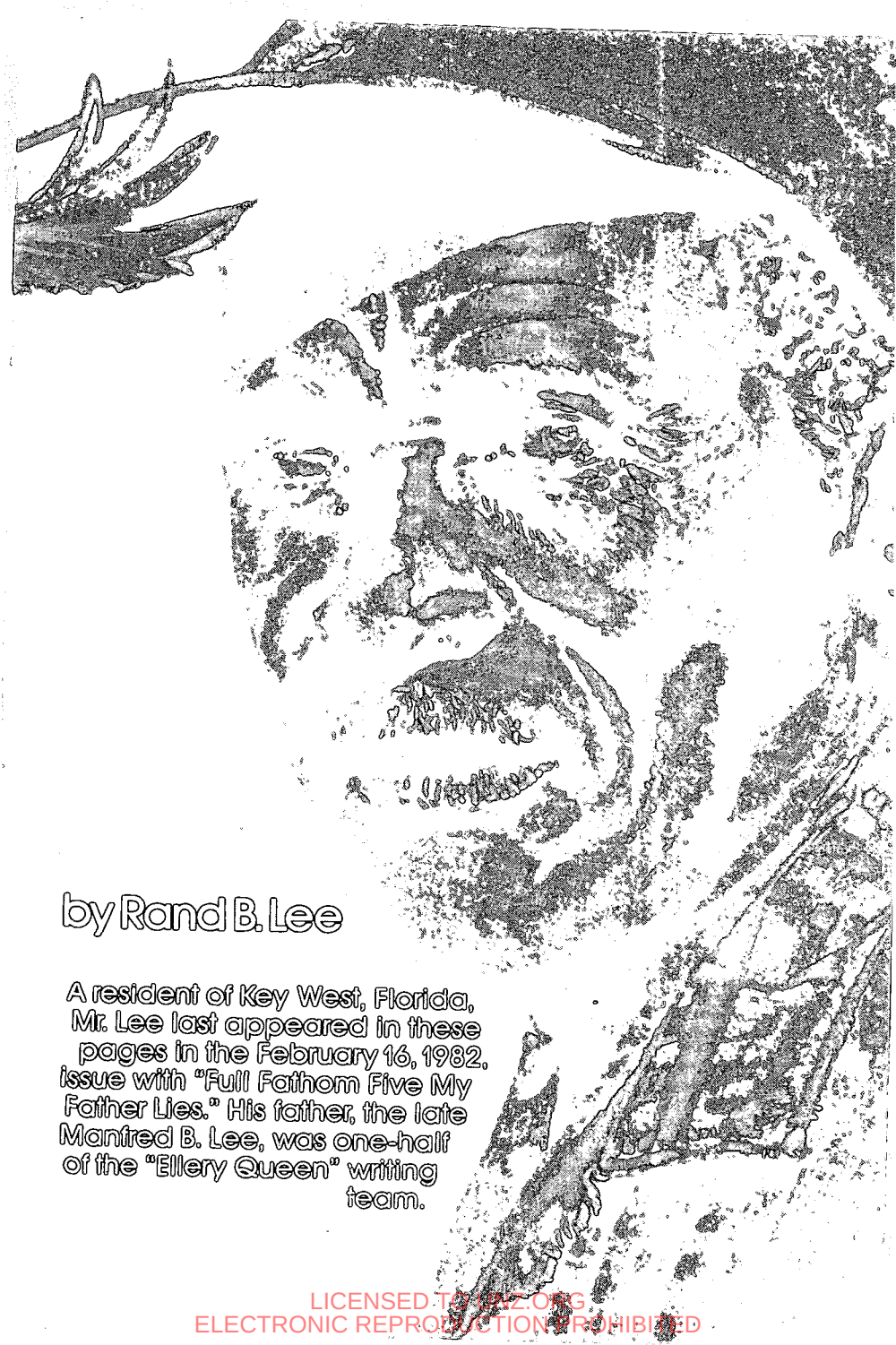

by Rand B. Lee

A resident of Key West, Florida, Mr. Lee last appeared in these pages in the February 16, 1982, issue with "Full Fathom Five My Father Lies." His father, the late Manfred B. Lee, was one-half of the "Ellery Queen" writing team.

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On that very last morning, the alarm woke Hugh Mabary out of the most beautiful dream of his life. He struck the clock, and it flew through the air, hit the pine wall of the cabin with a thud, and clattered to the floorboards. Mabary clutched the sheet to him and tried to recapture what had been stolen from him. The last wisps of the dream were fading; all the complexities of character and circumstance were losing substance, dwindling to the image of the white gull flying over the dark city and the sluggish river. Moonlight gleamed off wing, gemming the murk. His heart leaped. Then the image retreated and was stored, flat, in his memory. "Rise and shine," said a voice.

"Go to hell," suggested Mabary. Something furry brushed his cheek. He batted at it. It persisted. There was a moment of flailing and rib-prodding, and Mabary fell off the bed. Joe Braga grinned down at him through the forest of his grey beard.

"Good morning," Braga said.

"What time is it?" asked Mabary from the floor.

"At the time of the murder, the clock's hands were set at half-past five."

"Murder?"

"You have slain our loyal timepiece. Even now it spills its guts out on the floor." Mabary struggled to his feet and lurched toward the wash basin. "Come back," said Braga.

"There isn't time."

His lover caught his wrist. "Tell that to your hindbrain."

"My hindbrain and I have not been close for some years now," Mabary retorted. "Stop flexing your muscles at me." Braga let go of him.

"Tell me," Braga said.

"I had a dream."

"About?"

"There was a seagull in it. It was flying. Everything below was old and corrupt." He found that he was shaking. "That came at the end. There was a lot more. You were in it, and Dorothy, and other people from the Refuge. The gull came at the end."

"And?"

"It was the only beautiful thing in the world."

He began to weep, and Braga put his arms around him and held him as a father holds a son. Though he wept, Mabary did not relax. When Braga touched his muscles and nerves with his mind, willing them calmed, Mabary found himself fighting. Braga withdrew. "Wash up," the big man said. "Then we'll go to breakfast." They

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held hands as they walked to mess, but they did not feel like old friends.

The compound was cool with the early morning. The mess hall was nearly full, despite the hour. First-shifters were herding one another from the tables, making room for second-shifters who had not yet eaten. Everywhere people were holding hands: couples, often triples, waiting their turns in line, singing or talking softly. Mabary noted automatically and with satisfaction that the groupings were not according to talent. In the early days of the Refuge, a good many cliques had formed along such lines. Dorothy Laturno had discouraged this loudly, and Braga's and Mabary's pairing had created a powerful example. So many years later, with Dorothy Laturno dead and in her grave, Braga and Mabary were still called "the sike and the simp," despite there being several such couplings around camp. "My God, Joe," said Mabary as they moved toward the kitchens, "who are all these youngsters?"

"They're asking themselves who the two doddering old fools are."

Mabary grimaced. "How old was I last birthday?"

"Sixty-four."

"That's what I thought. And you were seventy." He patted Braga's absurdly flat stomach through the cotton tunic. "That seems improbable; but then I always went in for older men."

"That we're alive at all seems improbable," said Braga. He touched the scar on Mabary's forehead. "I'm glad you're talking. When you decide to tell me what's really wrong, I'll be even more glad."

"I told you. My dream upset me."

"You said it was beautiful."

"Losing it upset me."

"So deeply?" Braga murmured. "You're the psychologist, my friend, not I. But it doesn't take a mind trained in the convolutions of the human psyche to tell the difference between irritation and despair."

They were hailed. Eula Chan threaded her way through the throng toward them. Her food tray floated several feet behind her, like an Old Chinese wife following her husband at a respectful distance. For anybody else it would have been considered a thoughtless waste of energy—Refuge etiquette condemned as ostentatious the doing with one's mind what one could do with one's hands—but Chan was a mental hyperactive, the sort of sike who in ages past had caused poltergeist phenomena. Laturno, Mabary, Braga, and the other few who had founded the Refuge were the sort of people who are horrified by bureaucratic minds, which tend to reduce persons to personnel

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and names to numbers. In the cataloguing days, Chan had been classified Top-Secret, A-1, Telekinete First Class, Emergency Deployment Only, but now she was just Aunt Eula. "Jeez me beads," she said, coming abreast of them, "but don't you two look like little lovebirds? Skip the dofu; it's watery as hell. Any bad dreams?"

The men exchanged glances. "You sure you're just a kinny, Auntie?" asked Braga.

"Yeah," said the old woman, "but Mabbitt woke up yelling, said he'd had a vision. I was awake till three in the morning calming him down." She gave Mabary the eye. "So you did?"

"Not what you'd call bad, and not what you'd call a vision," he said. Suddenly he felt exposed, vulnerable. "Nothing apocalyptic or anything like that."

"What then?"

"A private dream, that's all, Eula."

"Don't evade me, boy."

"How is Mabbitt feeling now?" Braga asked. Chan shrugged.

"Foolish. Said being around sikes is driving him batty. Fact is, he registers slightly below leadhead average on every sike test imaginable, but the way he described his dream was so much like stuff I've heard from claires it bugged me. I'm going around asking all the simps whether they've experienced anything similar."

"One dream," began Mabary.

"Mabbitt *never* remembers his dreams."

Braga stroked his beard. "The conform theory. Auntie's pet."

"Laugh all you like," said Chan, with amusement in her small black eyes, "but one day we'll see it. Everybody's a sike, Joe. The ones we call simps just block it." She reached up and tapped Mabary's skull. "Even you, leadhead. Your dream have a seagull in it?"

Mabary started so violently that the person next to him in line turned around and raised an eyebrow. He nodded. Chan looked satisfied. "That makes five, not including Mabbitt," she said, and walked off. Her tray floated up to Braga and deposited itself in his hands, then sagged as the woman's mind let go of it.

"Conform theory," said Braga thoughtfully. "Everybody a sike; being around sikes long enough will bring out a simp's talent. I wonder."

"Joe, did you hear what she said?" said Mabary.

"Yes. She said she's located six non-talents who have dreamed about a seagull."

"You're taking this very calmly," said Mabary, angrily. His was an odd anger, unnameable like his sadness. "I wonder if any of the

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sikes had similar dreams."

"We could ask around," said Braga.

"It could be very important," said Mabary. He chewed the knuckles of his right hand. "I think I should go talk to Mabbitt."

"You're not going to eat with me?"

"There are four hundred people, most much younger and much more handsome than I, who would give their eye-teeth to sit at your feet at any opportunity. I'm sure you won't lack for company in my absence. Give me your tray."

"Meet me for lunch?"

"Okay."

He deposited Chan's tray in the rack by the kitchen door, kissed a child he knew, but otherwise avoided his friends on the way to the exit. Outside, he heaved a sigh of relief. The sun had not yet risen, and the morning mists swirled about the street. First shift had departed already for bed; second shift had not finished eating. He had the street to himself. He hesitated, wondering whether Mabbitt would be awake after his difficult night. Then he thought, *There's only one way to find out,* and moved down the street away from the mess hall.

He could not help remembering.

The revolutionaries had attacked on the third of May at eight o'clock in the morning, just as the salvage team was preparing to take the top off the ruined armory. Fortunately, there were a few seconds of warning: the team claire gave a yell, and all the sensitives suddenly shuddered as invisible scalpels scraped their minds. Then the sensitives were down, in various postures of discomfort, and the ground was erupting and the crane was doing odd things in the billowing dust. By the time things had settled, five workers had been hurt, three of them seriously. One, the claire, was dead, his skull crushed by a flailing cable. Everyone became very busy. The crane had been caught in a crevice that had opened up beneath it; it stuck out at a crazy angle, like a grasshopper in the mouth of a bullfrog.

Dorothy Laturno arrived on the scene almost immediately, reining her horse dramatically, swearing a blue streak, demanding why the camp precogs had not foreseen the incident, and holding about three dozen people responsible. Mabary, who was public relations director for the project, followed in her wake, saying nothing. "Where the hell is Joe?"

"Here." Braga stood up to his thighs in rubble. Some distance in

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front of him, sand and stone swirled lazily, piling themselves. Laturno dismounted and stood at his side. They watched the piles grow, the huge man and the huge woman. *Well-matched,* thought Mabary. He had known them both for several years, since he had been transferred to the Midwest Bureau of the National Bureau of Health and Education. He was already in love with Braga, and this was painful. But Mabary was twenty-two, and everything was painful.

The sands stopped swirling and finally settled. Braga had dug a pit. He and Laturno squatted, poked the ground. Laturno yelled. "What have you found?" Mabary called.

"A piece of a wendy. A goddam piece of a wendy."

They stomped to the lip of the excavation, Laturno brandishing the thing, which turned out to be a hand, messily severed at the wrist. Mabary stared at it in fascination. He had never seen a dead hand before. "They tunnelled," said Braga. "They set the charge. It went off prematurely. One of them was caught in the blast. At least one. There is more detritus below."

"If they had gotten any closer to the armory . . ." Mabary said.

"They wouldn't have dared," said Laturno. "They don't know what's down there any more than we do." She whistled into her chest mike. The orders she gave were short and to the point but good-naturedly so; she was in a sweet mood. She brandished the hand as she talked. Sickened, Mabary surveyed the ruins of the excavation. The medics were removing the claire's corpse and fussing with the wounded. One of the excavators had been pinned under a mound of earth that had come away from the side of the pit during the explosion. Someone was hurrying over; he recognized the new kinny, Chan. He had never met her; but she was said to show great promise. He watched her squat near the moaning worker, tiny in her green coveralls. Dirt began to flow. A medic stuck a needle in the victim's arm, and she stopped moaning.

It was all very efficient. All at once Mabary was extremely angry, and it was not with the revolutionaries. Fearful of examining why, he turned his attention back to the project boss. "How long do you estimate?" she was saying into her mike. "Too slow, Schure, goddammit! These things have to be tracked fresh. I don't care. Do it." She tapped the mike into silence and said, "Give me a hand, Hugh." He did so, and she grinned at her choice of words. Holding the severed member between her thumb and forefinger and giving a *moue* of distaste, she went over to her horse and dropped the hand into a pouch in her saddlebag. She came back wiping her fingers on her trousers. "How many kinnies would it take to lay our people low

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like that?" she asked Braga.

"It is not how many. It is how powerful," said Braga.

"We're talking about wendies," said Laturno. "Untrained talents."

"Unlicensed," corrected Mabary. Laturno frowned. "There are talents who have gone wendy before licensure."

"It does seem as though this attack, like the others, was executed with unusual deftness," said Braga. "The fire at the St. Louis offices; the mindburning in New York. The fact that no serious damage has been done is beside the point. We can attribute that to the quality of our people's training, not to any clumsiness on the part of the revolutionaries."

"Mindburn," said Laturno. She chewed her lower lip. "Chan told me they tried to mindburn you all just before the blast."

"Juan warned us just in time for us to throw up our shields."

"Shit," Laturno said. "A coordinated wendy effort, nationwide. It's inconceivable. It would be like trying to get a family of psychopaths together for a pleasant reunion. I suppose it would be possible, but only if a licensed talent coordinated it. But what licensed talent would? It isn't as though we're running some sort of Orwellian society here. This is still the United States of America. The secret police do not knock on doors in the dead of night; the Health and Ed Bureau is not doing secret genetic experiments and weeding out the inferior in order to build a master race. I can understand somebody from the street swallowing wendy propaganda but not somebody from inside. What would she have to gain by going over?"

"Who said that he would rather rule in hell than serve in heaven?" said Braga. He said it softly, so that only Mabary heard him.

"What I want to know is why the presence of the saboteurs and their goddam tunnel wasn't sensed earlier," said the boss.

"We know this area of Old Chicago is honeycombed with tunnels," pointed out Mabary. "Old streets, ceilinged with rubble. They wouldn't have had to dig far to join up with the armory complex."

"This area was swept for cave-in hazards before we set up camp," said Laturno. "No tunnels were reported."

Braga said, "A finder can't tell the difference between a tunnel that's been filled in and a layer of stable rubble."

"So they burrowed in last night when nobody was looking," said Laturno. "I want to know why nobody was looking. Who was on guard?"

"Nicolaisen and Poag were up," said Braga.

"Where are they now?"

"Nicolaisen never made it to watch last night," said Mabary. They

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stared at him. "I went by the infirmary to pick up some aspirin. He reported at 2000 hours with a severe migraine. They'd put him under by the time I got there."

"Who was next on duty roster?" asked Laturno.

"Keenoy," said Braga.

"And where," said Laturno calmly, "are Keenoy and Poag?"

Nobody seemed to know. The boss stood at the edge of the dig with her hands in her pockets. Mabary was glad, for once, that he was not a telepath. Even to his untalented senses her anger was so great it hurt him to look at her. Eula Chan had finished her work; the unconscious victim was being loaded onto a stretcher. "Tell me what I'm thinking is impossible."

"Improbable," said Mabary, "but—"

"But Keenoy," said Laturno. They had been lovers. When the finder team arrived, she turned to them with blood in her eye. The owner of the hand was traced. Their search led them to the wendy hideaway in the bowels of the old city. There were several hours of fighting, in the course of which Dorothy Laturno mindburned Jonna Keenoy and was nearly killed herself when Keenoy brought half the roof down on their heads. Keenoy proved to have been a top kinny, equal perhaps to Eula Chan. She had hidden it for years, masquerading as a finder. She was the first multiple talent on record to have evaded classification by Health and Education. She was also a major link in the remarkably well-organized network that, the following year, set into motion the Wendy War.

Mabary found the old cobbler in front of his cabin. He hung back in the mist for a few moments, watching. The black hands moved quickly, plying a needle; Mabbitt was sewing two pieces of leather together. As usual, he was naked, and though his body was withered, his muscles ropey, his skin gleamed with the same rich ebony it had held for all the years Mabary had known him. Chan liked to say that Mabbitt had the most beautiful skin she had ever seen. *How long has it been?* thought Mabary. *He was the last refugee in, before the barrier was put up. Was that '44? Mabbitt and that water-witching kinny. Wallens.* The memory of Wallens's dying face moved him to Mabbitt's side. "Hello, Mab," he said.

"Hughie!" The old man jerked up his head. "Didn't hear ya comin'. Take a load off, boy." He patted the chair beside him; Mabary settled into it. "Been a while since you came by. To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"Auntie told me about your dream," Mabary said.

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The cobbler stiffened, then relaxed and continued his sewing. "So what do you think?"

"I had one, too."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah," said Mabary.

"About a seagull?"

"Yes."

Mabbitt sighed. He did not look up from the moccasin, but the set of his shoulders told of his attention. "Tell me," he said.

"I don't remember much of it now. The alarm clock woke me before I could see how it turned out. You were in it, I think."

"What was I doing?"

"I don't remember. There were a lot of people from the camp: Dorothy, Joe. We were in the city again, and it was dying. It had been plague-bombed or something. I remember the river was already dead. Water like glue, things that stank. We were all arguing about something, some plan for cleaning up the river. The seagull came in at the end."

"Yeah?"

"It was like a song."

"Like the song of a jewel," said Mabbitt quietly. "Whiter than snow. Like light. Like I remember light."

For a moment, Mabary thought the cobbler was speaking figuratively. "Mab," he said, "you mean you saw your gull?"

"Saw as in eyes," said Mabbitt.

"I thought you dreamed in smells and touch and temperature."

"How do you think I could have dreamed of a seagull? This is the first goddam dream I've had in years that was visual. I usually don't remember my dreams, you know. And Christ, I went blind when I was six, and I can barely remember what sunlight looks like." He dropped his voice. "But that gull, now. That was no dream, Hughie. That was real. That was a real seeing."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Mabbitt, "it was a vision."

After a time Mabary said, "I thought you believed religion was the opiate of the people."

"Who said anything about religion?" snapped the cobbler. "And don't start thinkin' I'm goin' senile. It was the quality of the dream that impressed me. It was completely vivid."

"So was mine," said Mabary.

"There you are."

Where are we? thought Mabary. "We're not the only ones, Mab.

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Eulie says four others have had dreams like ours. All simps."

"Holy Kennedy," breathed Mabbitt. "Who?"

"I don't know. She didn't say. But she's asking all around camp."

"See? Eulie knows," the cobbler said. He chuckled deep in his throat. "She knows it was really something."

"She thinks this may support her conform theory, Mab. What do you think? Do you think we've got talent, and it's finally starting to show?"

"If it is, then it's sure taken its own sweet time about showin'," said Mabbitt. "I don't know, Hughie. Maybe. All I know is we saw something."

"Mab," Mabary said.

"What, Hughie?"

"I hope Auntie's right. I've always wanted to be a talent. I've never told anybody but Joe that before."

"Ever been checked out properly?"

"Of course. You forget how old I am. My mother brought me to the clinic at St. Louis University Hospital when I was eight, and every year after that till I was sixteen."

"Good old Bureau of Health and Education," said Mabbitt. "So they told your ma you were a bright boy but no dice, huh?"

"That's right," Mabary said. *Dear Mother,* he thought. She had wanted it for him, and she had been so relieved when he had tested normal. "What about you?"

"I never got tested before I came here."

"What?" Mabary sat up. "How old are you, anyway?"

"It's no secret. I'll be ninety-eight in August."

"Ninety-eight." Mabary figured. "You were born in the second decade of testing, then. Why didn't they get around to you?"

"Ghetto," said Mabbitt.

"I see."

"Remember Miami, Hughie?"

"Miami? You grew up in *Miami?*"

"Born there, just before the typhus came in from Cuba. We got out fast. Daddy took us up to Atlanta, and from there to Chicago. We moved into a building that was practically in the shadow of the old Moody Bible Institute. The Christians United for a Free America turned it into their headquarters; they made a lot of noise at night, I recollect." Mabbitt chuckled. "Daddy had bad luck in choosin' his abodes. They started the bombing, and that's how I got blind. Damned if he didn't get us out, though, the three of us. I had two sisters. He marched us up the steps of the Institute singing 'When

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the Roll Is Called Up Yonder' like his life depended on it, which it did. We thought he was crazy: bombs goin' off all over the city and he's singin' hymns. But they looked at me with my face bandaged up and looked at him lookin' at their guns like they were the loaves and fishes, and by God, they let us in."

"That was twenty-five years before I was born."

"More or less," said Mabbitt. His face dropped. "That was Chicago in my dream last night, Hughie. I felt it plain as rock, smelled the stink. Now, how long has it been since you smelled a gasoline engine?"

"Tell me about your dream," said Mabary.

Mabbitt's hands kept moving. "Too beautiful," he said. "Too hard to keep fresh in your head. We were walking down State Street, Eulie and I, out to take the air. It's nonsense, of course; I didn't even meet Eulie till I came here. I'd heard of her, though, from the revolutionaries. Yooliechan the Chink Vampire. God, we were scared of her. She was the Establishment's top bitch, all right, and everybody knew it. They said she could raze a building with her mind. I wish I had a five for every fancy plan we came up with to get rid of her.

"So we were walking, ambling, like, with the noise of cars and their stink, actin' like there was no war, no Health and Education, all the time in the world. There was this preacher on the corner. There were always boys from Moody preaching on State, real nice, real white—all shot to hell during the Chicago Revolution, of course. And that's a funny thing, because in my dream we were both in the war and not in it, sort of. Anyhow, we were walking down State, and there were some air-raid sirens going off, but they didn't bother us; we just kept walking. And there was this preacher on the street-corner talking out of the Old Testament: Second Samuel. You know your Bible, Hughie?"

"Some."

"Samuel tells about King Saul and King David and what they did," Mabbitt said. "It was the part when King David is going to fight a battle against the heathen, and the Angel of the Lord comes to him invisible with his army. And the sign he gives"—and here Mabbitt began to sound a little like a preacher himself—"is the sound of his wings in the treetops. In my dream, the preacher preached on that. He said the Lord was near; we could hear the sound of his wings in the treetops if we listened hard. It was time to change our minds about our sins and turn to Jesus."

It was the sound of an army, not the sound of wings, thought

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Mabary, but all he said was, "And the seagull?"

"It came pretty soon after that," said Mabbitt. His voice was hushed; he was seeing it again. "The sirens got louder and drowned out the preacher. Then they stopped, and everything was so quiet. Now up to this point my dream was a blind man's dream, Hughie. Then it changed. I started *seeing*: a light. Far off in the distance at first, a moving light moving toward me. I grabbed Eulie and started yelling I can see. Then I could see everything, the city and the preacher and Eulie, kind of blurred, but there. You and Joe, too. He's real big."

"He is that," said Mabary. "And the gull?"

"It came out of the light," said Mabbitt. "It was hovering, Hughie, hovering above us, like I don't know what, like a father protecting his children."

"Shit," said Mabary. Their eyes were wet.

"It flew away," said the cobbler. "And I wanted to fly away with it."

"I know," said Mabary. "So did I."

Chicago had gone, and so had St. Louis, but there was Kansas City, and the Provisional Government of the Midwestern United States of America set up headquarters there, in the same complex that housed the Midwest Bureau of Health and Education. The Bureau, owing to its superior foresight, had moved some months before. The government had been slower to act. What had begun as the Wendy War had grown into something much greater. Radical groups that would not have dreamed of joining forces fifty years earlier had suspended their differences in an unprecedented show of cooperative terrorism. And the plagues had returned.

They had come the first time a hundred and fifty years earlier. The United States had been in the grip of one of its periodic economic depressions; an extremely conservative government had been in power; the death toll had been high, and the Russians had been blamed. Then the *Washington Post* had come out with the most sensational exposé since the Watergate scandals of the previous century: the viruses had escaped from an American military testing laboratory in northern Michigan, and they were a new strain, recently developed despite government statements that bacteriological warfare projects had been abandoned. The next government was dominated by liberals. The National Bureau of Health and Education was formed in these years to disseminate information about the plagues and to teach people how to care for the dying.

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Twenty years later, the first sikes showed themselves. The Bureau pricked up its ears. The first wave of plagues had abated, yet the appearance of the espers and the disappearance of the disease seemed an interesting coincidence. The Bureau set quietly to work amidst the political, military, and ecclesiastical excitement. No conclusive evidence was put forth linking the mutated disease and the mutated humans. Nevertheless, the Bureau was placed in charge of studying the new talents. It was the *National Enquirer* that coined what came to be known as siketalk: *sike* from psychic; *patty* from telepath; *kinny* from telekinete; *claire* from clairvoyant; *simp* from simpleminds. And later, when the Bureau began licensing some talents and surgically putting the damper on others, it was the unlicensed talents who came up with their own designation: *wendies,* after Wendy, the little girl who left Never-Never-Land for adulthood and yearned to return, in vain.

Sikes kept being born, at first in North America, then South America, then the Soviet Union and China and westward around the globe. The National Bureau of Health and Education suggested to Congress that children be tested for talent as a matter of course. It was about the fifteenth year of testing that the plagues returned. A mutated typhoid fever swept into the Florida Keys from the Caribbean, spread to Miami and thence into the Deep South. Two years later, a new bubonic erupted in the Southwest, at first among cattle, then among humans. Talent and non-talent alike died, but it was found that talents, particularly kinnies, seemed somewhat less susceptible. Certain politicians accused the Health and Education Bureau of trying to reproduce the conditions in which the first sikes appeared, hoping thereby to weight the population in favor of the talented. There was rioting in Miami and Chicago; large sections of both cities were destroyed. By the time Hugh Mabary was transferred to the Midwest Bureau of Health and Education, Chicago was a mixture of ruin and ghetto, a center for underground wendy activity.

So the Wendy War came, and the Bureau and the government both fled to Kansas City, and there Mabary found himself in the spring of his twenty-seventh year. He and Joe Braga had been lovers for six months. There was no real place for Mabary in the complex; his old public relations job had collapsed with the public communications systems. So they made him a psychologist and assigned him to interview captured wendies. For three years he put his stamp of approval on the official Bureau license withholding certificates.

The day he quit was the day Eula Chan dragged in the arsonist.

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They stripped the prisoner, burned his clothing, sonicked his body clean, checked his rectum for bombs and such, and shoved him into the room where Mabary was sitting. There were guards behind Mabary, trying unsuccessfully to look professional, detached, and inconspicuous. The arsonist sat down on the cement floor and waited. Mabary looked him over. He was fifteen years old, Navajo: bronze-skinned, flat-nosed, high-cheeked. His straight black hair fell into his eyes, and he stared balefully at Mabary through it. He had tried very hard to set fire to the Health and Education Emergency Relief Facilities.

"What's the matter?" he said after a while. His voice trembled. "Ain't you never seen a wendy before?" *He's fifteen,* Mabary thought.

"Never one so stupid," said Mabary. The boy flinched. "How could you have expected to get away with a stunt like that?"

"I almost got away with it."

"You could never have gotten away with it. Trained sikes had you pinpointed practically from the moment you entered camp. It was just a matter of time."

He shrugged. "So okay," he said. "Now what are you going to do with me?"

"I don't know," said Mabary. "I'm just a psychologist. Give me one good reason why we shouldn't sterilize you."

This scared him. He stood up and started yelling. The guards grew tense; Mabary shouted the boy down. "If it's anybody who should be namecalling, it's me! Who tried to poison the water supply to the training camp? Who mindburned Dominica Juarez, our pregnant patty? And what about the charming bonfire your people made of your hostages? Say it was retaliatory."

"It was retaliatory!" said the boy.

"Pig shit. It was the most cowardly piece of terrorism I've ever seen, and it didn't work. We're not terrorized; we're plenty pissed. You blew your last chances of peaceful settlement to this whole mess."

"Peaceful settlement. Putting us on a reservation? Carving up our brains?"

"Testing your kids and training those who are trainable for full sike status. Giving you decent medical care, decent food. Education, too—ever hear the word? And a chance at reintegration."

He settled back onto the floor. "You lie well," he said.

"And you're just a walking cliché, wendy." He let this sink in while he scribbled notes on his pad. The boy was a very low grade kinny; he could barely open locks and could only fan flames with

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his mind, not start them. Mabary said, without looking up, "How badly do you want to stay free and fertile?"

"Screw you," said the boy, but he was listening.

Mabary looked him in the eye. "Help us and we'll license you."

He expected the boy to spit or spring at him or laugh. He began to weep instead. When he was through, he tossed back his hair and smiled without much rancor. "My mother wouldn't let us cry in her house. Do you ever cry?"

"Yes," Mabary said.

"I wanted to be a licensed sike more than anything else," said the boy. "I really did. They said I showed promise. I was nine. We all had high hopes: Navajo Kid Makes Bureau. They disqualified me when I was thirteen. Sick, they said."

"It appears they were right."

"I was just a kid." *Two years ago,* Mabary thought. The boy leaned forward, eyes sharp. "I was scared. For years I'd gotten telepathic flashes and not known what they were. The Health Ed guy in our neck of the woods knew about V.D. and alcoholism and bubo, period. He wasn't equipped to handle multitalents. What could the people from the city do with me? They only saw me once a year. But they decided I wasn't worth working with, see? And whose fault was that?" He wrung his hands. "I was getting good, I tell you. I could have been a top sike. But there was this war on, and I wasn't straight enough for them."

"So you joined the Revolution." *Paranoid schizophrenic,* the file read. *Delusions of grandeur, delusions of persecution.* The boy had had so little talent that he had not been judged to need suppression-surgery. "Look, kid," said Mabary, leaning across his desk. "Every wendy has the same story. Every wendy claims to have been classified unsuitable because of prejudice, a psychologist's whim, bureaucratic stupidity, economic pressure—you name it. None of you seems willing to entertain for a second the notion that you were just plain unsuited to licensure. It's no shame; it's a fact. I'm unsuited to professional athletics. So you accept it, and move on. Learn to use your other talents."

"It's not the same," said the boy. *I know,* thought Mabary. "Siking is—magical. Everybody wants to be a sike. Who wants to be a wendy? They cut you so you can't use your talent any more." He was trembling again.

"They didn't cut you."

"Is that what my records say?" the boy sneered. "I'll bet they do."

"They—we—hardly ever cut anybody," Mabary said. "Only crim-

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inals, violently insane people, people whose talents would be used to hurt themselves and others."

"Liar," said the boy. "They cut me. They cut people all the time. How would *you* feel?"

"I don't know," said Mabary. "I'm not talented."

He did not know why he had said it, and once again he was unprepared for the boy's reaction. "You poor shit. They got you by the short hairs, don't they?"

"Watch your language," snapped a guard.

The boy ignored her. "You get a kick out of working with your little gods and goddesses? Get a kick out of hunting wendies because you don't want anybody to have what you can't have?"

It hurt Mabary more than he had imagined it would. "You're right, kid. I'm just a woebegone sadist. Now that you've seen through me, I suppose there's just no point in talking any further." He finished writing, folded the paper, and handed it to a guard.

"What are you going to do?" said the boy. He was very frightened.

"What do you want us to do?" Mabary asked.

"What do you mean?" He was trembling again. A guard moved in. He leaped to his feet. "Don't touch me."

"Easy," said Mabary. The guard threw him a questioning glance. "I told you. Decide to join us, and we'll license you. You'll be classified as one of the lower grades, but you'll be a real sike, and we'll train you to open locks quicker than any safecracker and help put out fires instead of help make them worse." The guard moved in.

"No." The boy darted just out of reach. His face was drained of blood and empty of reason. *He's having an episode,* Mabary thought. The guard caught the boy. He began screaming, largely incoherently, kicking and punching. The guard and Mabary held him down while a second guard prepared a hypodermic. Gradually Mabary became aware that the boy's screaming was making sense to him, that the boy was screaming, *Cut me, cut me,* and that it was warm in the room, too warm for a Midwest April. The boy's frothing mouth and thrashing body flashed before him. *Something's wrong,* thought Mabary. *Cut me,* screamed the boy. The guard prepared to administer the sedative.

The boy burst into flame.

The mist rose at last, and the Refuge stood glittering. Folk filled the streets. Mabbitt was hailed by several, but he returned only cursory greetings. He and Mabary had woven a tight cocoon of memory about each other, and they did not want it pierced. "Come inside,"

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the cobbler said, so they went inside his little cottage and talked the morning down at his pine table. They spoke of the dreams, and of the War, and the people they had known, and the very odd thing that was the Refuge, and the barrier.

"Were we Hitlers, Mab?" Mabary asked at one point. "Was it like Hitler and the Jews?"

"You're askin' the wrong person," said the blind man. "I was on the other side, remember? Sure as shit Health and Ed didn't have folks' *welfare* in mind."

"It got so muddied," said Mabary. "Too many elements had entered the picture. It was no longer a question of who was fit for licensure as a sike and who wasn't. It was political. Health and Ed became a tool of the government." He put a hand on Mabbitt's shoulder. "Did I tell you why I finally quit?"

"Braga was thinkin' of quittin', wasn't he?"

"Yes, but that's not all it was," said Mabary. The edge in his tone was lost on neither of them. "They caught a kid in the middle of committing arson. His file read that he was a nut. Young kid, fifteen, talented but not very. That's what the file said." Mabary shuddered. "The file was wrong. He freaked out and set himself on fire. He died before we could put it out. I watched him burn; I beat him with my hands. He'd claimed to have been a potential Class One, denied proper licensure, surgically suppressed. The files said no. The files lied."

"Oh?" said Mabbitt.

"I found a surgery order on an old disk. The kid *was* suppressed. But it was wartime, and they did a lousy job. Some other cells took over the talent functions. I found out he'd lived with his mother till their house had burned down. She'd burned to death."

"He wanted you to finish the job," Mabbitt said.

Mabary nodded. "To make him pay. It was uncovering the conflicting reports that did it, Mab. I was such a naive little bastard; I'd really believed we'd given these people a fair shake. That's when I quit."

"And came here."

"Eventually." Mabary smoothed the table-top with his hand, then stared at his hand. *Christ, I'm old,* he thought. "The Refuge makes up for some of it, don't you think, Mab?"

"Sure does, Hughie." Mabbitt chuckled. "I'll never forget old Wallens's face the day we walked into camp and all of you were here. We knew Laturno and Chan and Braga from the Most Wanted lists. We didn't know where they were. All we really knew was there was

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this Refuge for people who the wendies and the sikes both didn't want. We sure as hell didn't know who we'd be showerin' with the first day."

Mabary laughed. "I remember you, too. You were how old in '44? Sixty-three or sixty-four? Walked right in, bold as brass, Wallens right behind you. You came right up to Auntie and said, 'I want a lay and a bath, not necessarily in that order.' Then you found out who she was, and you almost fainted."

"The next day we put up the barrier," said the cobbler. "We were the last lucky ones." He shook his head. "Now that spooked me—all of them kinnies and patties standing around in a circle holding hands, getting into each other's heads. It was like a funeral. After it was over, I turned to Wallens and said, 'What the hell? I don't feel no barrier,' and he said, 'Just listen,' and he walked over to the edge of the camp and made a run at the air. It was like paper crackling."

"He lit up," said Mabary. *Like a Christmas tree,* he thought, and he wondered how long it had been since he had thought of Christmas.

"How we laughed. And it wasn't two years before he was gone."

"Long time ago," said Mabary.

Mabary excused himself at noon, saying he wanted to get lunch. "I'll be back to let you know what I find out about the others," he told Mabbitt. The cobbler nodded.

"Maybe we should all get together," said Mabbitt. "Compare notes."

"I'll see to it," said Mabary, and left.

On the way to the mess tent he passed a group of children sitting in the grass, practicing the mindtouch. They took no notice of him. Even the youngest, eight-year-old September Miriamson, was so absorbed in concentration that Mabary could have shouted in his ear and received no response. A little farther on, he encountered a girl he did not know, sitting in a sand-pile digging savagely with a stick. Something in her face stopped him. He squatted opposite her and said, "I'm Hugh. May I talk with you?"

"It's no use; I can't hear," she replied. She did not look up from her digging.

"You just did," said Mabary. She glared at him. He saw that her dark face was streaked with tears.

"Don't make fun of me," she said. "I meant that kind of speak," and she pointed to the quiet circle of children.

"Oh, that kind," said Mabary. "I can't hear it, either."

Her eyes narrowed. "You can't?"

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"No."

She considered him. "But you're old."

"Yes, I am."

"Even September can hear," she said. "And he's just a baby."

"How old are you?" asked Mabary. She caught the amusement in his tone and frowned again.

"Nine and a half," she answered. "I'll be ten in March." She resumed her digging.

"Did you have a dream last night?" asked Mabary.

Her shoulders slumped, and she knuckled her right eye. "Yes," she said, in a small voice.

"I did, too," said Mabary. "A lot of people did who can't hear quietspeak. Do you know what mine was about?" She shook her head. "A beautiful big white bird."

She stopped digging. She was struggling with some great emotion, Mabary saw, trying to decide how much of it to show before this wrinkled stranger, deciding at last to show nothing. "Go away," she said. "I called to it, and it wouldn't answer me. Go away."

"Did you love it a lot?"

"Go away."

He was turning to leave when the attack came. The children in the circle began to scream. Mabary's first concern was for September; he whirled and started forward. The young sensitives were slapping themselves and dancing about, as though they had stumbled into a bees' nest. One of them began to beat her head slowly and methodically against the gorund. The youngest sensitive lay still, curled into fetal position. His eyes were open. Mabary knelt beside him and felt his pulse. The girl who had dreamed of the gull was tugging at Mabary's sleeve. "He's dead," Mabary said, to nobody in particular. He shrugged off the girl and moved to the sensitive who was trying to beat in her own brains. He caught her head and held it in his arms. She bit him, then slumped. The other children were dropping. He felt for her pulse, felt it flutter, then surge. The girl who had dreamed tugged his sleeve again.

Dimly he had been aware of other cries. Now he looked up and saw what the girl had wanted him to see. The mess hall was burning. People stumbled out of it, alarmingly few people. "Go ring the fire bell," he told the girl. "Run and ring it." She ran. He picked up September, then put him down again, and headed toward the flames. There was nothing in the sky but white clouds. *Thirty-four years,* he thought. *They've found us at last.* A man collided with him; they went down. The man flailed; Mabary thought of the Navajo boy who

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had killed himself. He hit the man in the jaw, and the man stopped flailing. Mabary got up, sucking his knuckles. *Joe,* he thought. *He was waiting to have lunch with me.*

The quadrangle looked like a battlefield, but the battle had been one-sided. Everywhere sensitives lay, moaning and thrashing or curled and silent. Braga was not among them. The fire bell began to ring. The calm June summer noon seemed to absorb the claxon, drain it of urgency. The roof and sides of the mess hall were burning. Thick, dark oil smoke poured out of the doors and windows. He looked around for Braga, but he could not see Braga, and all he could hear were cries, and he panicked. He pulled his tunic up over his mouth and nose and rushed into the smoke. The heat struck him like a fist. He fell to the floor and crawled. He could not breathe. He peered. The darkness was thick, as though there were more than smoke to it. Then he saw the bodies. There were dozens of them. *Mindburn,* he thought. *Burn mind, burn body.* It fit. He crawled. *I was late,* he thought. *He would have gotten my tray, as he always did when I was late, and he would have taken our usual spot by the window.* He crawled until he felt flesh beneath him, and he kept crawling. His forehead began to blister. He crawled under a table. *Our spot,* he thought. He could not see. He felt with his hands, with his mouth: a child, a woman, a man with a bushy moustache; a man with a beard. His heart dropped into dark. He pressed close. *You can always tell by the teeth,* he thought, and then he wondered why he had thought it. Then he remembered: *The bunker. Were we like the Nazis, Mab? Was it like Hitler and the Jews?* And he clung to the hairy body in the tunic and jeans.

The smoke rolled in like fog. There was fire behind it. It was then that he saw the gull. It was flying against a night from which the stars were missing. There was a roaring in his ears, so he could not hear the beat of the long bright wings or catch the knife-edged cry, but its glory lifted him after it, out of the smoke, above the flame, out into the free air. It was night, but it was day also. He looked down, and he could see the Refuge. There were the cottages, set out like so many cloches in a bed of green; there the greenhouses sparkled and the solar collectors winked; there the wind turbines turned in slow majesty; there the fields stood, lush with beans and corn. Far away rose the fence, which physically represented the barrier that had kept the Outside outside for so many years. Beyond the fence, the virgin forest tumbled away.

And there was the sky. He saw it black and starless, and at the same time he saw it as it surely was, immense, fathomless, the

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clearest blue, smeared with high cloud. The gull wheeled, catching light in its feathers. Mabary rose to meet it, and he felt as though he were falling into the sky, falling into a field so vast and open that it brought a lump to his throat, with the mountains, huge as they were, merely nibbles at its edges.

Hughie! someone cried. It was Mabbitt. Mabary's vision was full of gull and sky, so he did not see the cobbler, but he felt him and heard him. *Hughie, it's happened! Eulie was right!*

You, man! It was the child who had dreamed, the one he had sent to ring the fire bell. *Mabary! Mabbitt! Hugh!* He felt them all around him, all of the simpleminds, some of whom he knew only slightly, some not at all. But they recognized one another, and the gull.

Mabary thought of Braga, and the sky turned black again. *What's happened?* someone cried.

They attacked us, Mabary said.

Who? asked the child.

Folks from Outside, said Mabbitt. *The ones who have been hunting Hughie and Eulie and Joe and the others all these years. A lot of 'em must have got together, pierced the barrier.*

They mindburned Joe, Mabary said.

Eulie, too. They must've.

They killed September, said the child.

But what's happened to us? someone asked.

The gull burned in the darkness. They encircled it, danced around it. It sang to them. *Are you God?* Mabbitt cried. The gull did not reply but moved like thought, and shone.

It never answers, said the girl.

Not in words, said Mabary. *Look.*

The army was coming up the hill, toward the fence. Mabary could not count the number of people, but it was enough to capture a camp of four hundred stricken and confused. They wore green and carried weapons. They did not so much march as flow. *The ones in front are the sikes,* said Mabbitt. *They did the burning. The others are simps. They're along in case of retaliation, because leadheads can't be mindburned.* There was no sound, just the inexorable flow of cloth and metal.

Can they see us? asked the girl. *Can they see her?*

Nobody answered her. They were the planets, and the gull their sun. They began to fall toward the gull, and one by one it drew them in. Mabary did not lose sense of himself. He merely ceased to be concerned. Light filled him, all of them. They wheeled, and cried, and the night shuddered.

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Then David asked the Lord,
Shall I march against the Philistines?
Will you give them into my hand?
And the Lord said,
March,
For I will certainly give the Philistines into your hand.
It shall be, when you hear the sound of marching in the treetops,
Act at once,
For I will have gone out before you to strike down the army of the Philistines.

They struck. And the great light came, and scoured, and when it had passed, there was no army, no flow of cloth and metal, nothing but a green summer day and the hysterical crying of jays.

The great gull wheeled. *Why a seagull?* Mabary asked.

I read the book once, said Mabbitt.

They stood in the sunlight on the edge of camp, twenty simple-minds. The mess hall had stopped burning. The alarm bell was still clanging. They touched it, and it stopped. *The attack must have done it,* said Mabary. *Triggered something. There was so much power. It unblocked us. It was your dream we dreamed, Mab—your storybook gull, or maybe one you saw in Miami when you were a kid. Eulie must have been working on you all these years, hoping to stir up your talent to prove her theory. She must have been making some headway when they attacked.*

I can hear them! cried the girl. *They're sad. September's dead.* She began to run.

Damned if that ain't Eulie cussin', said Mabbitt. *Better check her out. She'll be impossible to live with after this.* They all began to move away, toward the camp. The cobbler stopped. *You coming, Hughie?* Mabary shook his head. Mabbitt gazed upon him for a while, then nodded and turned and melted into the summer sunlight.

The seagull wheeled, flickered, and went out. Mabary stood alone. *If you're going to go back, you'd better go now,* said someone. *Your body's not dead yet. You stopped the fire in time.* He turned. Braga stood, wrapped in light and fur. *Hello, dear heart,* he said.

You were working on me, too, weren't you? asked Mabary.

For years and years, said Braga. *It was very tiresome. You reached me just before I died, and you moved into mindtouch like a pro.* Braga smiled. *Go back, Hugh. You'll live to be a hundred.*

Mabary walked up to Braga and kissed him, and he found that although it was not very much like kissing, it was in some ways much nicer. It went on for a very long time. ●

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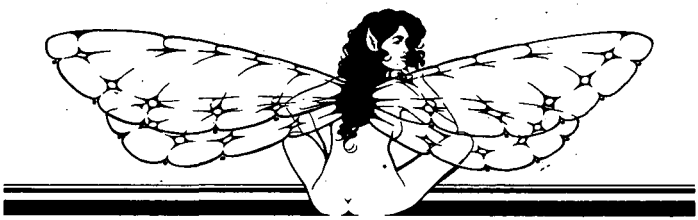

by Henry Clark

Henry Clark is the author of "Cynthia Myers is the author of Gilded Trellis *and lives in Portland, Oregon, with her husband and five cats," and lives in Smithtown, New York, with his wife and two children. He has also written "A scorching novel which lays bare the souls of women behind bars"; "A clear-headed account of extraterrestrial butchery in the wilds of Wyoming"; and "The new best-seller by the author of* Cellulite: Fat or Fiction?" *He is 48.*

Mr. Clark began writing blurbs at the age of 23 and made his first sale two years later, breaking into the field with the oft-reprinted "A Planet Waited to be Plundered," the inaugural blurb on a series of low-priced science-fiction paperbacks. For the past five years he has edited Short Shrift, *the newsletter of the Blurb Writers of America, lending his distinctive style to "Isn't It a Pithy?" a monthly column covering the state of the art. Of the blurb in science fiction he has written:*

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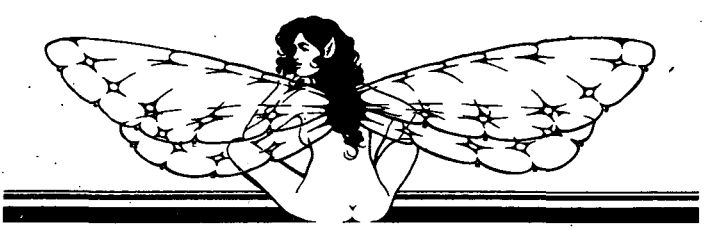
"It is an art form all its own. My own contributions have included the perennial 'Their Love Transcended Time Itself,' and the equally popular 'On a Ruined Earth They Sought the Key to the Stars.' I am also responsible for 'In the Tradition of Robert Heinlein,' a blurb which has never failed to move the book it adorns, provided Heinlein's name is printed twice the size of the author's. In the late sixties I introduced the practice of placing the words 'Hugo Award Winner' beneath the title of a book which had NOT won the Hugo award but the author of which had, the author being now, several years after the fact, just as apt to turn out a turkey as anyone else.

"The blurbs fronting the stories in science-fiction magazines are a special case. They are frequently the only things the busier readers find time to read. As such they are the most important writing in any given issue and more and more editors are turning to professional blurbists to ghost them. If I may apply the extrapolative technique which is at the heart of all good science fiction, the day may soon come when the blurb moves out of its parasitical ghetto and is allowed to stand by itself, in the mainstream, without the excess baggage of a book or a story beneath it." ●



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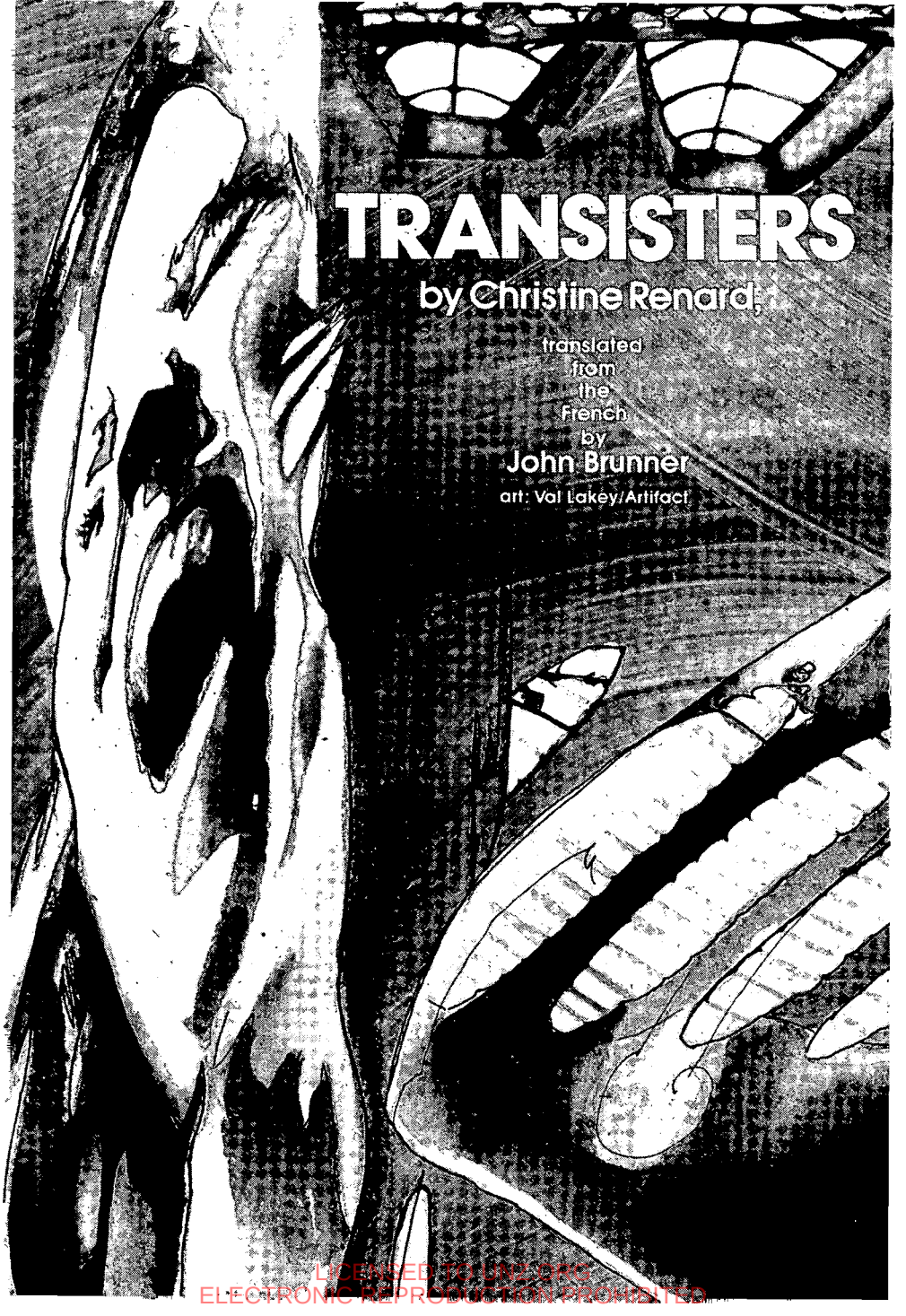

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The untimely death in 1979 of Christine Renard, who was a doctor of psychology as well as a writer, deprived the French science fiction field of a highly individual talent. John Brunner, who was a good friend of her and her husband, the toxicologist Dr. Claude Cheinisse, regards this story, from the posthumous collection *A la Croisée des Parallèles*, as one of her finest.

She was waiting for me, of course; she'd had my letter. There she was at the rear of the bar, with a glass of grenadine in front of her. Even before I actually looked at her I knew who she must be. Who, after all, would be drinking grenadine if not she, if not I, if not she or I or we, all of us in all the parallel universes? I saw the glass before seeing her, and what I noticed next was another glass, for she was sitting with her back to the door, opposite a long wall-mirror. On spotting me, she rose slowly to her feet. So I looked at us, at our two reflections one beside the other. I said to myself, "That's me, that's me, that's how I am." For we were very much alike: the same almost inter-sexual figure, the same sand-colored hair, the same wide grey eyes, the same hesitant smile. It took a few moments to work out the differences. Her flawless face and calm expression contrasted with my hollow cheeks and the hungry look in my eyes. Besides, she wore makeup, her eyebrows were plucked, her hair was elaborately styled. She was Cécile-the-Good.

I tried to tell myself I was better looking as I was, with my hair hanging loose, my eyebrows that had kept their natural line, my skin and lips that had never known cosmetics. However, being who she was, I found her exactly right—indeed, perfect. She was Cécile-the-Good, the one I'd decided to come and see.

When I made up my mind to invest an unexpected legacy in a return ticket with the Transparallel Corporation, I'd had to choose between several of my living counterparts in the parallel universes currently accessible; and of them all I'd picked this one, because she had found out how to be happy, and that was all I'd ever wanted. I gazed at her tenderly, such a tightness in my throat I couldn't speak.

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Not that finding yourself face to face with your double is any longer an exceptional event; although they're expensive, perhaps because they are, trips like mine are very popular. To go and spend a weekend with one of your alternates, and report back on the differences between you, important or otherwise, has become the trendy thing to do. There are even people who meet by threes and fours in the universe of one or other of them. I wonder whether everybody who takes this kind of tour undergoes the same emotions I did on meeting Cécile-the-Good.

We smiled and said in unison, in the same voice, "I'm Cécile!" Then we sat down facing each other. It was up to me to say something, but my lips stayed closed. She settled matters: "What will you have?"

"Grenadine and milk!"

And that was how we got talking—talking about all the grenadine we'd drunk as children. "You remember how it came in great big glasses, like beer-mugs, and we had to get water from the pump in the yard? I've never tasted water like that since, have you?"

Which was how we got involved as we never should have done. We talked as though we were sisters, twins, as though we had always shared the same experiences. Nothing could be further from the truth; I wanted to say as much, and finally words rose unbidden.

"You aren't my sister, you know—you aren't my sister!"

I suppose I must have gone on repeating that for a long time. She reddened, as I always do, and tears came to her eyes—another feeling I know well. . . .

"You aren't my sister, you *aren't* my sister—"

Suddenly I stopped saying it, because I realized she was talking too, in a very low tone. She was saying, "I haven't got a sister. I'm an only child."

I gave a hysterical laugh. For years I'd been convinced that the misery I endured nowadays stemmed entirely from the mischance of Isabelle's birth, daughter of my mother and my stepfather, whom they were forever holding up as an example to me. "I haven't got a sister. I'm an only child," said Cécile-the-Good.

So in your life, you who sit opposite drinking grenadine like me, that too-pretty half-sister didn't get born . . .

Eventually she spelled it out. Our stepfather, or I should say the husband of her mother, in her world, loved her as though she had been his own. Her childhood had not been haunted by the nagging question, "Why can't you be more like your sister?" For little Isabelle was always neat, always well-behaved, always top of the class. She

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laid the table, took off her muddy shoes at the door, put her things away, politely said hello to visitors . . .

I didn't mention that to Cécile, nor did I tell her about a certain conversation I'd once overheard through a door left ajar. I had clearly made out my stepfather's voice, though my mother was scarcely audible: " . . . not academically gifted . . . doesn't pull her weight when it comes to housework . . . " (I knew it was me he meant.) "Compare her with Isabelle," he went on. "Not just because she's *my* daughter. You know very well I accepted yours when we got married. You know I was prepared to love her too. And you mustn't think I don't, either. But she's been such a disappointment!"

I was twenty then. I packed my bag and took the train for Paris. Cécile-the-Good had known nothing of all that. She had come to Paris the same year as I—we found out it was even the same day—but she came with her family's approval and plenty of money in her pocket, to prepare for a teacher's diploma in English. Now she was teaching in a high school and married to one of her colleagues. They had twin girls. Me, I'd never managed to get through my ordinary school exams, and I had no husband, no job, no kids either.

What are they like, your twins? Blonde, blue-eyed, bright, adorable, hm? Is that so? Well, I won't tell you about my little girls, then: the two hideous fetuses that an obliging friend took and threw in the Seine the other Bastille Day . . .

I ordered a coffee. She started to question me. She wanted to know why I'd come on this trip. She was a little alarmed, I think. What had I come to do in her world? It was my turn to talk, but what was I to say, and above all, how was I to say it? I had no idea. I'd been taking it for granted that she would be married to Roland, but if her husband was an English teacher like her, it couldn't be Roland. I realized I hadn't even asked her married name. She told me, and I blushed. It was the name of a man I'd once let bed me, without either pleasure or profit, at a time when Roland was neglecting me. Blonde, blue-eyed, bright, adorable . . . Those two horrible things that went to rot in the river could have been—must have been—his, Bruno's. There were no twins in Roland's family.

She wanted to know what my life was like. I was quite prepared to tell her. I was staying in one of those bed-sitters where the water doesn't run and the heating doesn't work, but which cost practically nothing. Boys and girls without a penny to their names would come there to take pot-luck and spend long evenings at my expense; they hated work because they needed their days and nights to go cruising

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and sometimes write or paint.

So how did I live, or rather, on what?

Well, I did temporary secretarial jobs when I ran completely out of funds and I had to pay the rent or settle the bill at the grocer's.

"Then you're a Bohemian!"

That was what she said, in a totally altered voice. So I talked on while she stared at me with greedy eyes. I told her about eating chips standing up at the bar because it cost more if you sat down at a table, and living on sauerkraut with boiled potatoes because sausages and ham were too expensive. I told her about peddling drawings from door to door, and the search for bistros where one of us might be invited to play guitar and share the take with his friends. She listened, and her expression lost its calm.

Never tell me you envy the existence I lead! Every day when I get up I wonder what if anything I'm going to eat. . . .

I don't know whether I said that aloud, but I heard her murmur, suddenly shy: "I can't invite you to have dinner with us, I'm afraid."

We burst out laughing like a couple of crazy kids! Damn right I couldn't go home with her! I could just imagine the look on Bruno's face!

But there was food to be had in this bar, she said—nothing special, just fried eggs, or onion soup with toast and cheese, or steak and potatoes. She added, very red, that of course I was to consider myself her guest, since I was in her universe. They brought me a meal the like of which I hadn't seen in ages. She wasn't hungry, and she ordered another grenadine. Me, I drank red Bordeaux.

Now I was in a mood to answer her questions about Roland. Yes, I said, I did love the bastard.

And did he . . . ?

Well, no. Not at all. It was hard for me to say it, but I said it anyway. However, she didn't seem to be listening. With her glass up to her nose she said, "What's Roland's other name?"

Of course she knew him, or at least his counterpart. We should have thought of that earlier. She told me she had already been respectably engaged to Bruno, who was likewise studying for a teaching diploma, when she met Roland. She talked about falling violently in love, about a grand passion that made her so frightened that in the end she broke it off to marry Bruno after all. She tried to explain.

"I don't know why we fell in love so—so *extremely!* He wanted to marry me right away. I still wonder how we got to that stage. You know, I've clean forgotten?"

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I listened to her, feeling desperate. This was why I'd decided to risk this crazy trip, simply to find out what she was like—this other me who had managed to be happy, who wore my name and my age and my sandy hair and who had found out how to make Roland love her. But here she was telling me she didn't know, she couldn't remember. So I'd have to go back to my miserable room. I'd have to find another temporary office job. I'd bash away all day at a typewriter. I'd get ticked off because I'm a rotten typist and I always turn up late. And day after day I'd wait for a letter from Roland, and of course he wouldn't write. Ever.

"You speak English?"

The question made me jump.

"Ah—what? Oh, English? Yes, a little."

And we shifted out of French quite naturally. She stared at me in astonishment.

"But you speak well—very well indeed. You could cope even if we had English or American visitors."

And before I had time to ask what she had in mind, she told me. Her plan was so overwhelming, so unexpected, I could only mumble the gist of it to myself: "You take my place, I take yours . . ."

I scarcely heard the rest of what she was saying: " . . . sort out the details of the swap . . . nobody will notice . . . holiday-time . . . all the schools shut for weeks on end . . . the twins staying with relatives in the country . . . no chance for us to travel this year because of Bruno's thesis . . . we could get away with it for a whole month . . . "

Dazed, I repeated, "You take my place, I take yours . . . "

Well, that's over with. Here I am back again.

I screwed up Cécile-the-Good's home life, and it didn't take long. I'm not worried about her, though. She'll work out how to win her husband back, make him fall for her all over again, and in a little while he'll be wondering why he ever thought of leaving her. She'll sort out the house, too. Oh, no, I'm not worried about her.

During the same time, she found me a decent place to live, she got me a steady job, she bought me dishes and sheets and towels and clothes, and she made Roland very fond of her . . . *me*.

She hasn't got a sister. She's an only child.

It's scarcely a fortnight since I got back. Just two weeks, and the one-room apartment she carefully and painstakingly fitted out has lost all its comfort and all its smartness. Dirt and disorder have taken over, and the landlord has threatened to chuck me out. The

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company I keep horrifies him. He says I've changed, says he can't believe I've become as I am. But two weeks ago it wasn't me, *sir*. It was Cécile-the-Good.

Oh, Cécile, you're so *nice*, you're so *kind!* You didn't say a word when you saw what a mess I'd made of your home! Cécile, I did do my best, but, you see, my watch had stopped and I was dressed like a slut when your husband turned up with one of his colleagues. I couldn't join in the conversation because they talked about books I hadn't read, people I'd never heard of, politics too. Everything they said was double-Dutch to me. There was no ice in the refrigerator, and I'd forgotten to buy any crackers or salted almonds. There was only the tail-end of a bottle of whiskey and plain tap-water. The night your parents came to dinner the place looked like a battlefield, and there was nothing to eat. I'd forgotten. I did open a packet of soup and a can of ravioli, but I served them half-cold. I made a salad, too, but I didn't wash it properly, and I saw Bruno's father surreptitiously putting bits of grit on the edge of his plate. And the hem of my dress was coming undone and I'd lost the letter and the pictures we'd been sent by our relatives—I mean your relatives—who were looking after the children.

Some time later Roland called by. I couldn't resist him. I didn't want to have him in your place, so I went to his. When I got back, having lost my gloves, my handbag and my umbrella (What am I saying? *Your* gloves, *your* handbag, *your* umbrella!), there was a whole crowd of people, eight, I think. We had a dinner party, and I'd forgotten about it. I'd also forgotten to post something for Bruno, and it was urgent.

I left a file of his in a taxi; it was full of references he'd copied out, and it took him three afternoons at the National Library to do the job over. You'll also find out that I've ruined all your clothes and I took some sheets to the laundry and didn't keep the receipt. Forgive me for all that, and also for the state of your bank account. *I* don't know where the money went.

You were wonderful, Cécile, when I told you all about it: about your husband who couldn't stand me any more, so he'd gone to stay with his parents; about the maid who turned in her notice; about the landlord who treatened to evict us—*you;* about the friends who suddenly left your sinking ship. It was lucky I didn't swap with you during the school year, or you could have kissed goodbye to your career. As for having to look after the twins—God alone knows what would have happened if I'd been lumbered with them as well!

But in spite of all that, Cécile, it's really you who ought to be

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begging *my* pardon. Because when all is said and done, it's too unfair that you should know everything and me nothing! I think you understood that, and that must be why you didn't reproach me in the slightest. You felt ashamed; you were embarrassed at being so well off compared to me. Cécile, Cécile, ask me to forgive *you* for finding me a flat, bringing Roland back, landing me a steady job! Oh, I admit my first reaction was to say thank you—thanks for the visiting-cards, the telephone, the bathroom; thanks for the eau-de-Cologne, the bank account, the Formica in the kitchen, the curtains at the windows, the geraniums on the balcony; thanks for the suede coat, the navy-blue suit, the electric typewriter; thanks for the new sheets, the dictionaries, the everlasting flowers, the leather-bound desk-diary. Thank you, Cécile, thanks ever so much! But you must still ask me to forgive you for all that, just as I'd have to ask the forgiveness of all the Céciles who are in a worse plight than I.

Maybe I will have to. Maybe one day I'll see my door open to reveal a figure I know only too well, coming to me as I went to Cécile-the-Good, in search of help. After all, we parallel people sooner or later have parallel ideas.

When she turned up, I recognized her instantly, even though she

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hadn't bothered to write and warn me she was coming. She knocked at my door one afternoon; I opened up and in she walked, saying in that voice that is also mine, "I'm Cécile."

A waste of breath. I knew. You always recognize yourself.

Pale, thin, sharp-eyed, she wore faded jeans and a huge old leather jacket with enormous pockets. One held a flask of whiskey, the other jewelry. She was prepared to split the whiskey but hung on to the jewels because she said she had to live off something. When I left the Transparallel arrival platform in the world she hailed from, she assured me, I'd be met by a small-time burglar who would look after me. Before my trip to visit Cécile-the-Good, I might have conjured up visions of this being my chance to enjoy an adventure, going on the spree with gangsters, living it up in Riviera hotels; and into the bargain I would no doubt have thought I was going to rescue Cécile-the-Thief, help her create a new identity with a clean police docket. By now, though, I had no more illusions. She wouldn't change any more than I would.

I could tell what was bound to happen. If I managed to stay out of jail, I'd find a room over there and also a part-time job; I'd fight with my landlord and my employer; I'd change flats and bosses; I'd survive as best I could, but I'd do it without stealing and boozing. And I'd certainly have lovers, but equally surely I wouldn't find a lasting love, because there, just like here, I'd be good at seduction and I'd quickly grow bored. When I was in love, I'd try to hang on to the guy, and he'd do his utmost to tear loose from my clutches, and one day, tired and disheartened, I'd let him go and start the same old story with someone else. Yes, over there it would be the same as here. It would always be the same.

And in the meanwhile Cécile-the-Thief would do a moonlight flit from this apartment, which Cécile-the-Good had gone to so much trouble to find and do up. After that she would drift from hotel to hotel, boyfriend to boyfriend. Lots of men would get involved with her, because she knew how to make herself liked: Roland maybe, even Bruno. . . . But she wouldn't love either of them. She'd go on looking for someone more like herself, and when she found him, first they'd snatch a few bags to pay for their whiskey, then they'd knock off a bit of jewelry. . . . One day they'd get caught, and she'd wind up behind bars, and so little by little she would reconstruct around herself the world she was running away from, the one where she wanted to send me.

I was so convinced of all that, I scarcely heard her when she told me I wouldn't be risking anything, because I didn't have the scar on her thigh by which the police always identified her. *Of course*

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not, Cécile-the-Thief, Cécile-the-Drunkard, I wouldn't risk any worse in your universe than I did in Cécile-the-Good's! No matter where I was, I too would wind up recreating my own version of the world. I told her; I said, "No, I wouldn't be running any risk." I said it wearily, almost in despair. With all my heart and soul I wished I might run risks. I wanted the universe to have the power to change me! I said as much, sipping her whiskey—not a lot, because I wasn't used to it, but nonetheless admiring her ability to put so much away without showing any effects.

I talked an awful lot. At all costs I needed to make her share my understanding. I said, "You realize Cécile bought me dresses, bed-linen, crockery! She found me a good job and a nice flat, lured back the man I love. . . . And me? I loused it all up! Roland can't stand me any more. He's run away. It didn't take long for him to get sick of me."

Then I explained what I'd done to Cécile-the-Good's home. I bombarded her with my theories: you can't keep what you don't deserve, what you aren't destined for. Proverbs came back to my mind, like the one about water finding its own level. Because, you see . . . I really ran off at the mouth.

Suddenly she interrupted. "Shut up and listen to me for a minute, will you?"

I did as I was told.

She lit a cigarette, took a long drag, and declared that Cécile-the-Good and I were a couple of prize assholes.

All right, maybe we were—but why?

"Because," she said, becoming serious and thoughtful, "you took her place as I'm going to take yours. But to me it's just a way of putting the enemy off the scent. I'm not going to pretend I'm you, and I advise you not to pretend you're me. Trying to be somebody else is a fast way to not being anybody."

I said to myself that if insights like that could be found at the bottom of a whiskey bottle, it might be worth learning to drink the stuff.

But she went on, in full swing now.

"When you were in her world, you knew it was her and not you they were talking to, her and not you they trusted, her and not you they loved. It's not surprising you set out to screw everything up. And all that just because you wanted to acquire 'her' personal talents. Which is crazy! If they exist, they're what all the Céciles have, including you and me."

She added in a bright, ironical tone, "I know very well what my

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main gifts are—cunning, gall and charm! I guess you've noticed, hm? Well, all the Céciles must have the same. We've got a handful of trumps, you know."

I said diffidently, "I don't seem to have all that many."

She laughed. "Oh, that's because you're playing the dummy! You haven't even looked at your cards! But the hell with it. Is there anything to eat around this dump?"

While I was opening a can of ravioli, left over from the stocks Cécile-the-Good had laid in, I said without looking at her, "If my mother hadn't decided to marry—*him* . . . "

"Oh, the poor old sod! He's mad about Isabelle. So what? She's dumber than the law allows. In any case, if those two hold any top cards, you can ignore them because they play so goddamned badly! And talking of top cards," she added, lighting another cigarette from the stub of the last, "did you know that you or I could write if we wanted to? I mean become top-notch authors. At any rate I know about one of us who's a hell of a successful novelist. I call her Cécile-the-Great. Say, isn't that mulligan of yours ready yet?"

So we sat down to ravioli and crackers. When I poured myself some grenadine, at first she laughed. Then, coloring, she asked if she could have some too. Oh, it was true that we were all alike—not just because we all had long hair, but because we all loved a bull-session, all had a taste for adventure—even Cécile-the-Good, who had proposed her swap with me on the spur of the moment. What any of us did, all the rest could do.

She spiked her grenadine with whiskey, and we smiled fondly at each other.

Then she said she was sleepy and dozed off face-down with her head pillowed on her arms. I set about clearing up. Memories of childhood came back to me, I don't know where from because I'd forgotten them—really forgotten. I let them take me over; why not? I ran myself a bath, and while the tub was filling, I switched on the transistor radio Cécile-the-Good had bought me. Still clearing up, I listened to the news, then a book-review program. I contemplated buying the book they were criticizing. I wanted to read it, very much, and I also wanted to start taking a daily paper. By now the flat was spick and span. I made plans to put some flowers around the place, without remembering that I was due to hand it over to Cécile-the-Thief, my twin.

Who chose that moment to wake up and roll over on her back, half-smothered by her hair, her eyes swollen with sleep, not looking in the least either glamorous or dangerous. I smiled at her. Yawning,

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she mumbled, "Ow, I've had a skinful!" I made her some coffee, and she drank it gratefully, then, to my horror, gulped down another half-glass of whiskey. But she said she felt fine now, and suddenly she started to inspect the room curiously.

"You've got it all straight, haven't you?" she said as she lit another cigarette.

That was all, but that was enough. There was a dazzling rightness about the words. I hadn't realized it, but it was perfectly true. I muttered something about my bath getting cold, shut myself in the bathroom and sank delightedly into the water. I was humming, "I've got it straight, I've got it straight!" Besides, there was something else, less impressive maybe, but for me more significant. I'd listened to the news and I wanted to go out and buy a paper and a book. I wanted to read something, not in order to please Roland but simply because I felt like it. Amazing!

So I didn't stop at soaping myself all over, brushing my hair and making it up in a neat braid, putting on clean underwear and a new dress bequeathed by Cécile-the-Good that I hadn't yet managed to ruin. I told Cécile-the-Thief that I was leaving her everything: the flat, the checkbook, the lot. All I was going to take was my handbag, so as to have a bit of ready money.

Just as I was about to walk out, the phone rang. It was Roland, calling from the bar on the corner to ask—or rather to order—me to bring down all the drawings and canvases he had left at my place. He would be waiting below to take them back. A wind of freedom was blowing through the treetops of my life. I told him I certainly wasn't going to put myself to that much trouble and he could damned well come and fetch them himself, but not right away because I had to go out. And I hung up on him.

I left everything to Cécile-the-Thief, as I'd said I would, and going down the stairs, I couldn't help feeling that after all it was good not to own anything once you realized you could have everything and replace everything. Maybe one day—no, assuredly one day I would write marvelous books, because what Cécile-the-Great had done I could do, and possibly better, since I had behind me the experience of setbacks she had doubtless never known. I would find the love of my life, and I'd have children, and I would go on drinking grenadine.

In the lobby Roland accosted me with a peevish air. He said, "So now I have to bust a gut climbing up and down all these stairs of yours, as though I didn't have anything better to do!"

"Nobody's forcing you," I told him blithely. "In any case, you can't do it now. I haven't got time, and the janitor hasn't got the key to

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my flat. In a day or two, if you like!"

I never saw a man more taken aback. He was used to seeing me looking meek, with my shoulders bowed. A taxi was passing, so I hailed it.

There had been a breakdown at Transparallel, and the company was honoring its obligations to its passengers by entertaining everybody planning to make a trip, which included me, because I was off to take the place of Cécile-the-Thief.

There were only a few of us, and we were all very different: an actress, a financier, a typist, a famous university professor, an adventuress, and a man of what is known as "independent means"—I suppose you'd call him a playboy. How had all these various people solved their problems? What had they learned in their travels, through meeting their opposite numbers?

That evening we sat chatting in Transparallel's VIP lounge. The old professor seemed unwell; he spoke quietly and coughed a lot. The adventuress struck me as having grasped little of what there was to be learned from a parallel universe; she proudly told us how one of her counterparts had made a tremendously good marriage, and sighed, "I haven't had her kind of luck!" The typist, who had won her trip thanks to a competition on the radio, likewise rambled on about how successful her alternate was, who worked as a manicurist in a big store. The playboy, though, was rather amusing; pretending to be embarrassed, he made out that his alternate was a country parson. Nobody believed him, but we all laughed, which helped us to relax.

The financier, on the other hand, was a drag; he never stopped complaining that this delay was going to foul up some deal he had going on the Stock Exchange. The actress groused a lot, too, afraid she was going to miss her chance of some important part. She was quite a well-known star, and to be honest I had imagined her younger and prettier. She said she knew how to make the best of what she had, spoke bitterly of her miserable upbringing in a Paris slum, slightingly of her counterparts, who had taken to stealing or walking the streets. She talked about guts and free will. I bristled with rage. Was she the only one to have avoided what must have happened in more or less the same way in the childhood of all the twins she affected to despise? How could she be so sure that some seemingly petty incident hadn't clipped the others' wings?

Then the old professor spoke up, and we fell silent.

"An *alter ego* of my own, who's a well-known philosopher in his

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universe, claims that human beings can dominate any situation they find themselves in, and if they don't, it's because they're afraid to. I don't agree with him, because another of our counterparts was sent to a concentration camp when he was still very young. It was only for a few months, but it was enough to break him. Now he's teaching in a little village school, and he will never write anything again."

All of us knew that he too had been interned. It followed that he must have retained the power to dominate events. But he wasn't prepared to stand in judgment over those who hadn't. With all my heart I hoped that I would never lose my sense of tolerance, never forget how many of us haven't been able to play our best cards because someone else prevented us.

When the old gentleman stood up, the playboy courteously and respectfully handed him his walking-stick.

Now I could think without regret about the times that were gone forever, the quicksand of the years where my childhood, my youth, were mired beyond recall. I could think of them without anger, without sorrow, without even resentment. My unpublishable manuscripts at the bottom of a drawer, my mismanaged love-affairs, my would-have-been daughters whom I killed on Bastille Day—I had to forget them all. One of these days I would have done great things, I would have written books, I would be loved by the man I wanted most, I would have children, and I would be as beautiful as any of the uncountable Céciles.

My new friend the playboy tapped me on the shoulder, saying, "We're going to pass the time with a hand or two of bridge. Coming?"

"On my way!

"But watch out—I'm going to wind up the winner!" ●

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ELEMENTARY DECISION

The quark and the lepton went to see
"If matter could ever conceivably be
Composed of components more element'ry
Than we."

"Between us," the quark said, "we two constitute
The essence of matter, the crux; and to boot,
Besides being, both of us, *ne plus minute*—
We're cute."

"Take care," said the lepton, "although that sounds fine,
They once thought the *atom* the end of the line;
If they found they could parse us, your star would decline.
And mine."

So the quark threw a tantrum. The lepton, on cue,
Snarled scurrilous threats, then, pouting, withdrew.
The quark, in retort, filed complaints for review.
(None true.)

It worked. Their carefully
choreographed "unrehearsed" squall
Shows all sub-atomics in peril of recall
A surefire technique for forestalling the call:
Act small.

—Don Anderson

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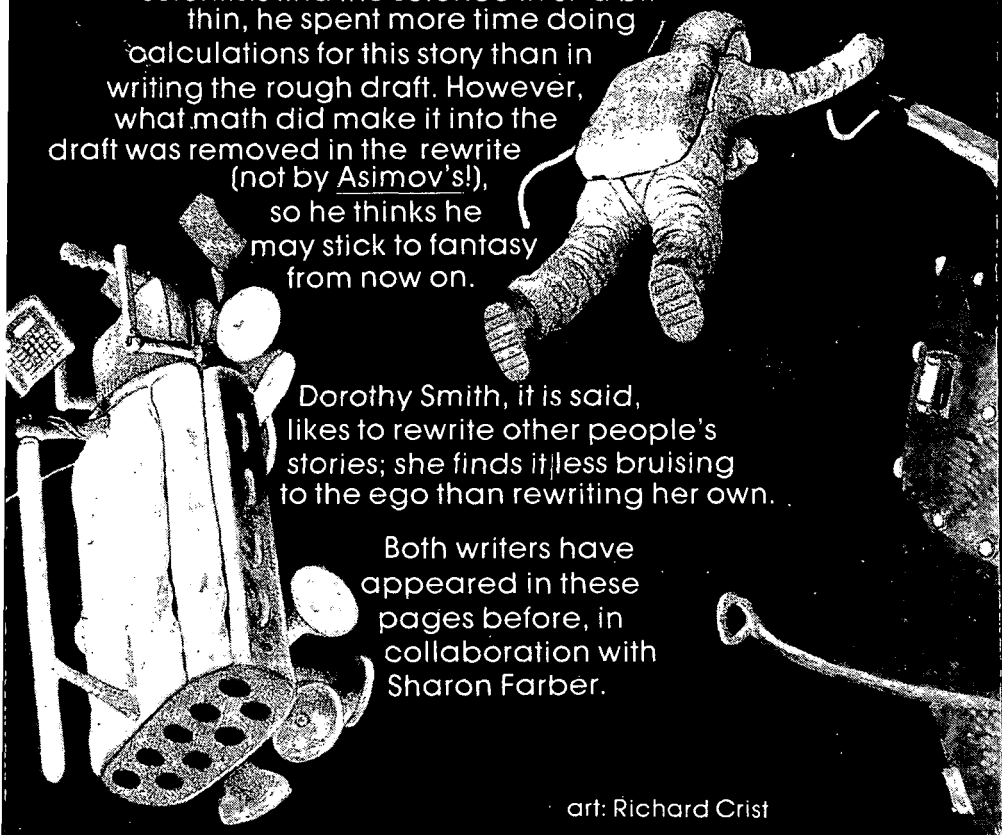
HIGH IRON

by James Killus & Dorothy Smith

James Killus is currently employed in the field of atmospheric research, smog chemistry division. Since he feels that most scientists find the science in SF a bit thin, he spent more time doing calculations for this story than in writing the rough draft. However, what math did make it into the draft was removed in the rewrite (not by Asimov's!), so he thinks he may stick to fantasy from now on.



Dorothy Smith, it is said, likes to rewrite other people's stories; she finds it less bruising to the ego than rewriting her own.

Both writers have appeared in these pages before, in collaboration with Sharon Farber.

art: Richard Crist

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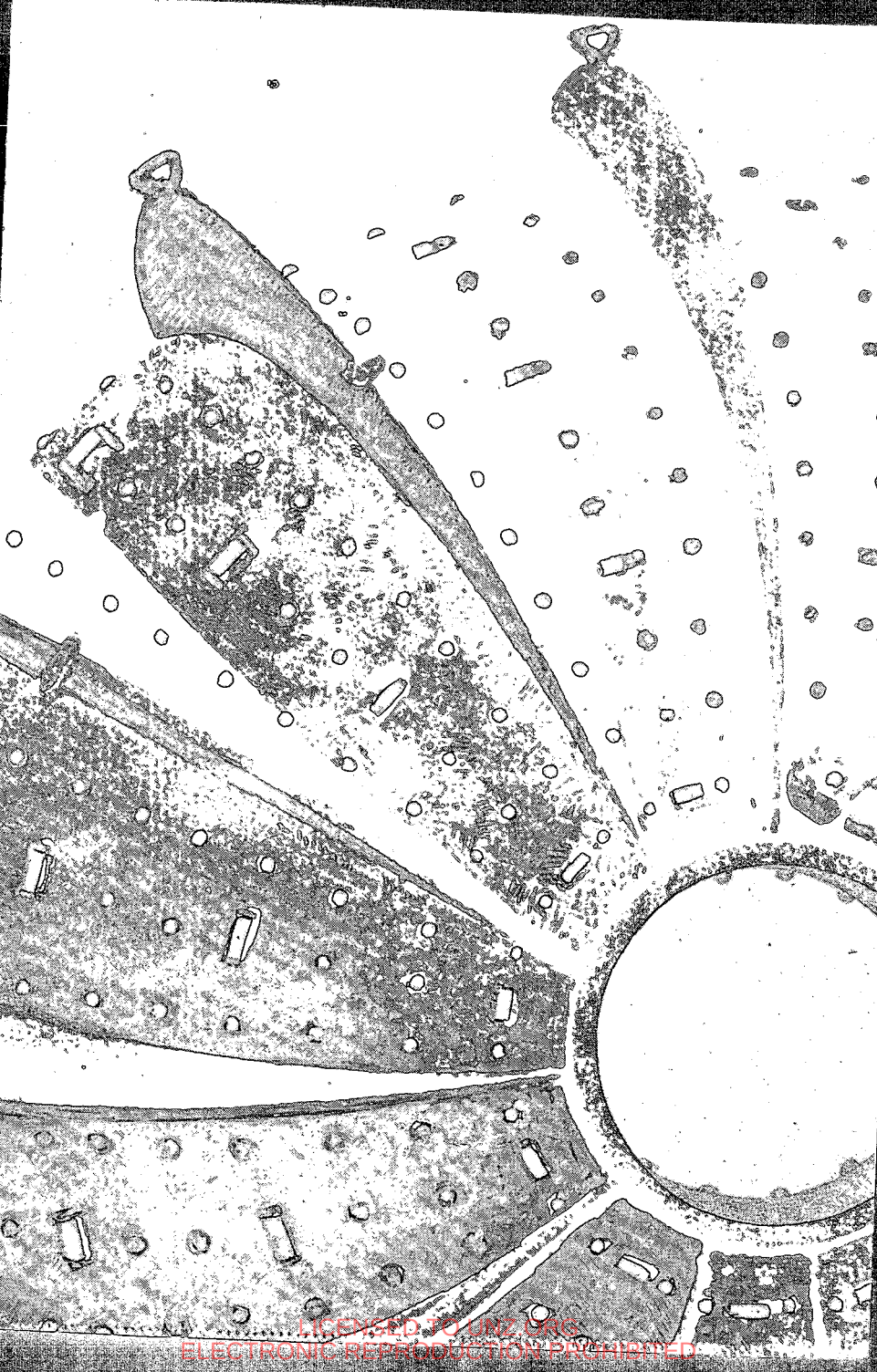

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On the three hundred and seventh day, just as the asteroid was crossing the orbit of Mars, the towing cables of the B motor snapped. This was not, to say the least, an expected occurrence. Three boron filament cables attached the fusion tug to the asteroid; any one of them should have been sufficient to take the force exerted. But one cable snapped with a *thrum* that made the entire asteroid resonate, and the two other lines parted immediately after that.

Three motors were linked to one another by thin anchor lines to form what was dubbed a "power triangle" configuration, each side of the triangle being about a kilometer long. When the B motor tow lines broke, the triangle decomposed, anchor lines were severed, and the A and C exhaust streams raked the asteroid with blasts of ionized nickel-iron before the automatic cutoffs shut the motors down. The edge of one of the ion streams brushed the comm link antenna, and the entire long-range microwave system went out in a chorus of circuit breakers. Short-range radio space filled with shouts, exclamations, and intense profanity.

Sloan saw the cable break, or at least the immediate consequences thereof. Without a conscious thought he clambered onto a nearby scooter and brought it to full power. The blue ion stream came to life, and soon he was boosting toward the rapidly dwindling tug at a rousing one half of one percent G. The drive of the B motor had shut down, but there was still a faint residual glow to it.

"Everybody shut up, and somebody give me a velocity for the damn thing!" he yelled into his suit mike. "I'm going out to try to bring it back!"

"Come back, Sloan," said someone, probably Sand. "We'll go get it with one of the other motors."

"The hell you say," Sloan replied. "It'll take days to tack the shields back on them. We wouldn't be back to normal operation for weeks, maybe longer. We don't have that much time."

There was silence at the other end; the others realized that he was right. Then another voice came on, tight and even. "B motor is moving at just over eleven meters per second on a heading of roughly 125/210. Can you reach it?"

Sloan checked the power reading on the scooter and did a quick mental calculation. "Yeah, I think so," he said. "I'll be out of suit range in a bit, so hurry up and get the main transmitter back on so I don't get lonely. Figure out what I'll need to get the motor back and any other tidbits that you can think of. And hey," he said as an afterthought, "no pessimism, all right? I'm in enough trouble without any self-fulfilling prophecies to contend with."

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The man behind the desk was affability personified. Sloan liked him instinctively, but he still held to those reservations that one feels with salesmen or lawyers. It was Sloan's eighth interview, his third with the man behind the desk.

"You will be happy to know that this is your last interview," the man said. "We want you as a participant on the Project, though the level of your participation has yet to be decided. That is one of the purposes of this interview. Have you made all of your arrangements?"

Sloan nodded. "The Comsat antenna job ended last week. I told everyone that I was going to accept a job Luna side. We had a party to celebrate. Construction work is pretty nomadic. No one will miss me."

"Family?"

"My parents are dead. I haven't seen my sister in years, so a few more won't matter. You know all this," Sloan said impatiently.

The man nodded. "Suppose you tell me what you think of the Project."

"What's to think? I still don't know what it is."

"You must have formed some conjectures."

"I prefer to keep them to myself."

The man smiled. "Very good. Discretion is a virtue. However, I do need to know the extent of your surmise, to judge your intelligence and imagination and to see how well our precautions are working."

Sloan hesitated. "Okay," he said. "I'll play."

He looked at the man behind the desk: a mahogany desk, hauled up from Earthside to Circumterra-2 at a cost exceeding Sloan's annual salary. And his salary was substantial, trained orbital construction workers being highly paid technicians.

"You have money already, so this is no cheap scam," Sloan said. "I think you'll play straight with me, for whatever that's worth. You've been paying me good wages just for having interviews, taking tests, and keeping my mouth shut.

"You're a bit too secretive to be just another lunar mining company sitting on a hot property, though you try to give the impression that that's what you are. But that wouldn't explain why the job will last several years. If I had to guess, I'd say that whatever you're up to is illegal or nearly so, and sensitive as hell."

"Does that bother you?"

"That depends, doesn't it? It might affect the risks associated with the job. As for the ethics, well, I have some, but I figure that you can't make me do something that I don't want to do. You're not in

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the market for slaves. Beyond that I make no judgments. And no more guesses."

The man behind the desk pushed a sheaf of papers at him. "Here is your contract," he said. "Read it and sign it and then I'll tell you what it's all about."

The sled was almost out of power when Sloan finally matched trajectories with the fusion motor. He had to do more course correction than he had anticipated, and he swore bitterly at the power gauge. He gulped an antioxidant tablet and then he jumped.

The motor was doing a slow tumble, having picked up a spin from the torque of the unevenly breaking cables. It looked like an acorn doing a lopsided somersault. There were handholds jutting out all over it, loops in the waste heat radiator that formed the motor's outer skin. The "cap" of the acorn was where the control systems were, so Sloan jumped for that.

He wrenched his shoulder and almost missed fastening the scooter line to the motor before the line pulled taut. There was a jerk; then the line began wrapping around the motor as the giant acorn slowly reeled in the scooter. Finally the scooter touched the motor, and Sloan lashed it down before it could rebound. Then he plugged himself back into the scooter life support to conserve the air supply in his suit. He sucked another antioxidant tablet from his helmet dispenser.

The radiation monitor in his suit agreed with the telltale on the motor control panel. The dosage rate was minimal, far below the danger level, which would trigger the tone alarm in his helmet. But antioxidants should be taken before the radiation exposure to be effective; when he started the fusion drive, he'd get a stiff dose of whole body rads. So he chewed on a white tablet while he thought things over.

Sloan finished reading. "You guys really play it close to the vest, don't you? I sign this, and I vanish for from one to four years on 'Project business.' No mention of what the Project is. If I sign and don't like the Project, I become a 'non-participant,' with full base pay excluding skills premium and stock participation, but I still vanish."

"That is correct. We are very serious about our security, as you have surmised. We will pay you to sit on your hands and not talk to anyone for the duration of the Project."

"Sounds like house arrest."

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"In a benign form, I assure you. No torture, all the comforts of home. It would not be solitary confinement either. We need at least fifteen people to act as decoys."

"Decoys?"

"The Lunar mining charade, which you saw through."

"Oh."

"If it is any comfort, the Project will probably be discovered before completion, so the full four years is unlikely to be required of those who remain behind."

Sloan thought for a moment. He was already committed to satisfying his curiosity, if nothing else. "One last thing. This 'stock participation of one hundred shares equal to one tenth of one percent of issuance for the Enterprise'—how much is that worth?"

"Capitalization is on the order of two hundred million dollars, but that is to cover expenses. If the Project fails, liquidation would bring only a small fraction of that. The securities laws actually forbid my giving an estimate of probable profits, but sign the contract and I will bend those rules. I will also tell you the nature of the Project."

Sloan picked up the pen. "Mind that the ink doesn't clot," said the man behind the desk. Sloan looked at him quizzically.

"Just a little joke," the man said.

Sloan, we've figured out what you'll need to return. The whole thing must be done in ignition mode; full power would mash you flat. So don't activate the accelerator field. Instead let the ignition burn last for 2.5 seconds along the return axis. Just aim and fire; the orbital corrections are too small to matter. You can be a little sloppy about the two and a half seconds, too, and you needn't be too precise about aim. We're linking up some cables to hook onto you when you come by. Anything within five km should do it.

"Yeah, yeah," he thought. "But first I've got to stop this damn thing from tumbling." The scooter was out of power; it didn't have enough to stop the motor's spin even when fully charged. He timed the spin. Nearly two rpm. Not enough for the centrifugal effect to cause him any problems.

The motor was about five meters in radius. It massed at close to fifty tons, most of it water. The water was in a jacket surrounding the fusion chamber, the "kernel" of the acorn. Less than a meter thick, the water jacket served as both fuel tank and shielding. Fast neutrons from the fusion drive were moderated by the water and captured either by the water itself or by the lithium hydroxide blanket surrounding the water jacket. The reactions produced deuterium

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and tritium, which, together with additional lithium, constituted the motor's fuel.

The water also served as a heat shield and cooling system. When the drive was on, the water circulated to the outer skin, where radiator fins sent waste heat into the dark of space. Now the circulation pumps were down. The water would still be hot and under pressure.

Sloan disconnected from the scooter and rummaged about in the B motor tool kit. Within a few seconds he found the right sized wrench. Then he took apart one of the radiator fins. The cutoff valve sealed the water tank from the fin as soon as the pressure dropped. The water in the fin boiled off to form a fan of ice crystals as the vapors expanded and cooled.

One of the fin components was a J joint pipe. Sloan took the pipe and connected it to the water inlet port of the motor. It was not a completely tight fit; the pipe was the right size, but he did not have full freedom of placement. He could not screw the pipe down all the way because the "J" had to be pointed in the direction opposing the spin of the motor. No matter; it would hold.

Sloan then opened the inlet valve. With the release of pressure, the hot water in the B motor began to boil. A spray of steam issued from the J pipe and began, very slowly, to retard the spin of the motor.

The spray expanded and became an ice fan, which caught the sunlight and for an instant blinded him with a full circular rainbow. He looked away hurriedly and closed his eyes. The afterimage, a rainbow of complementary colors, was beautiful too.

The man behind the desk said, "We are going to bring back an asteroid, put it into Earth orbit, then cut it up for sale to the industrial satellites."

Sloan's jaw dropped. "That's impossible," he blurted.

"Well, I won't say that it will be easy."

"Not even a fusion motor could . . . " Sloan's voice trailed off.

"We have a new motor design. Among its other features, it includes the ability to use material from the asteroid itself as reaction mass. I can show you the specs if you like. Or I might mention that one of our principals is J. Markham, of Markham Fusion Design. Benedict Sand is another of our major shareholders."

Sloan said nothing. Markham and Sand were names to conjure with in the satellite clusters. Such men did not attempt the impossible. They always played to house odds.

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The man behind the desk continued. "The industrial satellites are supplied with raw materials from the moon, courtesy of the lunar mass booster. Aluminum, oxygen, silicon, and titanium—these we have aplenty. Volatiles like hydrogen, helium, and even carbon and nitrogen are so rare on the moon that we have to import them from Earth.

"There is another class of materials that are supplied from the moon but at a premium: the siderophiles, elements like iron, nickel, and cobalt, which are associated with meteors, planetary cores—and asteroids.

"The moon's crust is deficient in the siderophiles. Iron, for example, makes up only one half of one percent of the moon's crust, an order of magnitude less than its concentration in the Earth's crust. And on the moon, iron and the other siderophiles are evenly distributed. There are no iron ore bodies on the moon because the geological and biological processes that concentrate these elements are absent."

The man behind the desk smiled. "My, how I do go on. Ah well, the bottom line is this: iron and its sisters are extracted from the lunar soil at considerable expense, because of the huge processing overhead. Then lunar industry gets first dibs on all lunar production. So metallic iron, nickel, and cobalt, F.O.B. the L-4 and L-5 industrial clusters, are expensive and under the control of the Lunar Mining Authority. It is a monopoly run for the benefit of the lunar corporations, and we are tired of being gouged."

"So you're out to break the LMA," Sloan said.

"We intend to engage in a little cream-skimming, that is all."

"They won't like it."

"They are not the only ones. The Earth nations are not going to like having a few hundred million tons of metal sitting overhead. Some of it might fall, or get pushed. They would stop us if they learned of our plans. We must present them with a *fait accompli*. Men whose greatest motive is power will find it hard to believe that we are only in it for the money."

"Are you?" Sloan asked. "Only in it for the money, I mean."

The other man shrugged. "Who can say? We have no military aspirations, I can tell you that much. To what purpose? What can you get with a gun that money cannot buy more easily?"

"How much money?" Sloan asked.

"The most conservative estimate that any of us has made is that the asteroid will amortize over forty years and will net out better than two hundred billion dollars."

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Sloan blinked. "But if my share is a tenth of a percent . . . "

"Provided we can actually bring the asteroid back and hang on to it, your eventual payment would be on the order of two hundred million dollars."

Sloan sat quietly for a long time, utterly stunned. "You could have gotten me for a lot less than that," he said weakly.

"This management does not believe in binding the mouths of those who thresh the grain. Besides, we want *enthusiasm.*"

"Jesus," was all that Sloan could say.

We have the radar back, so we can see you again. From the radar trace you just did something; the image got messy. We don't know what you did, so we'll pretend that it was a good thing. Markham thinks that you're trying to stop a spin with steam pressure from the water tank. Guess that would make you a real "Hiero," eh?

"Yok, yok, yok," thought Sloan with no small degree of sarcasm. "If it's so funny, why am I in a cold sweat?"

He had tried to adjust the rate of steam escape to stop the motor's spin and leave it in the correct attitude for the return thrust. It had not quite worked out. The motor had been in a tumble; the arc swept by the exhaust "nozzle" (actually a magnetic lens) did not ever point in the right direction. To make matters worse, the steam pressure began to drop before he had expected it to, causing the motor to overshoot.

In fact, he barely got the spin stopped at all. When the motor finally ceased rotating, the steam from the pipe was barely a whisper. Inside the water tanks ice was beginning to form.

And the motor was a full ninety degrees from the correct attitude.

Oh Christ, he thought. What do I do now?

Well, we've figured out why the cable snapped. The boron filaments have been neutron-degraded. As near as we can tell, there's enough of some contaminant like uranium in the asteroid material to give the exhaust stream a significant neutron emission rate. Or maybe the exhaust has different scatter characteristics from our lab tests. Anyway, the neutrons transmuted the boron in the cables until they lost their tensile strength. Boron has too high a cross section; we should have used graphite cables. But that's why they all went at once. The process got to the cables on the B a bit faster than on A and C. It's a slow business, and now that we know about it, we can replace the cables near the motors regularly. So it won't give us any trouble from now on.

The spinning of a gyroscope, Sloan was thinking, imparts a torque

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opposite to the direction of the spin. The motor has a mass of fifty tons, with a moment of rotational inertia pretty close to that, since so much of the mass is at the edges. A gyroscope of one kilogram mass would have to turn fifty thousand times to rotate the motor once. A hundred-kilo mass would need only five hundred turns. Since I only need to move the motor by ninety degrees, make that one hundred and twenty-five turns of a one-hundred-kilo mass.

But the motor doesn't have a gyroscope.

Except me.

Sloan sighed and disconnected himself from the scooter air supply once more.

Then he began to climb.

On his first circuit of the motor, he passed over the exhaust nozzle, and the tone alarm in his helmet yelled at him. Secondary radiation in the fusion chamber was still high, high enough when unshielded to trigger the warning. On subsequent circuits he looped around the exhaust port, first to the right, then to the left, to balance out the correction.

Man and suit massed at about a hundred and ten kilos. As he climbed in one direction, the motor rotated in the other. For each time he completed the circuit, the motor rotated by almost three quarters of a degree. Just a hundred and twenty times around and he would be done. Just a bit over three kilometers all told. Just a nice Sunday stroll.

Right?

Reach around for the next handhold. Stretch, grab, pull. Slide between two of the little servo-robots that handled the reaction mass electrodes when the fusion drive was on and too hot with radiation for humans to be near. Don't dwell on that last thought. Just climb. Rotate the huge mass with nothing but your muscles for power.

—Get me a couple of spare power packs and a big oxy tank. If Sloan can't get the motor turned around, somebody's going to have to go out and babysit with the sorry son of a bitch until we get the shields back onto one of the other motors so's we can pick him up.

—How much air does he have?

—About a day's worth, counting suit and scooter. More if he takes it easy, maybe a day and a half.

Yeah, that's me, taking it easy. It's so nice to have sympathetic, understanding companions.

Sweat clung to his face and body, the zero gravity making it seem nearly viscous in its tenacity. He was afraid to vent his suit; he couldn't spare the air. If his suit ran out, he'd have to plug into the

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scooter, and then what could he do? Lug it around on his back? He kept climbing while the tone alarm made a variety of odd, attention-getting noises. *Too hot! More air! Watch out! CO_2!*

Snap out of it!

He had almost passed out, so he stopped to rest at the scooter. There was still plenty of air in the scooter reserve tank, but would it be enough to get him back? It certainly wouldn't last a day at his current rate of exertion. The asteroid had shrunk to a featureless point of light. He had been gone for hours. It would take just as long to get back; every minute before the return thrust was two minutes of delay. He didn't want to come barreling in too fast to catch. Besides, anything longer than the recommended two-and-a-half-second burst would kill him with the radiation from the drive. It might kill him anyway.

He didn't like to think about that. He started to climb again.

What can you buy with two hundred million dollars? What can't you buy with two hundred million dollars? I would gladly pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today. Actually, I'm not that hungry. Exercise kills the appetite. It throws the metabolism into catabolic ketosis. So make that an iced tea, *garçon*. With lots of ice, mountains of ice, planetoids of ice. They say that the moons of Saturn are mostly ice, so make it a tall cool one, topped with a bit of Saturn's rings and garnished with an extinct orchid. Send the bill to my accountant. What do I pay you guys for, anyway?

For the third time since it all began, he almost didn't make it. He made the last few adjustments of motor attitude after his suit air had run out completely. He'd had to flush out his suit with air from the scooter, climb around the motor once, then plug himself back in before he fainted. The last few corrections, matters of only a few degrees, took nearly half an hour. The entire operation of rotating the motor had taken over four hours.

When it was done, he spent several minutes securing the scooter to the front of the motor, as close to the drive axis as he could manage. Then he punched the control sequence into the manual command system, set the timer, and returned to the scooter. He plugged himself in and seated himself on the scooter seat. The acceleration would barely exceed one G, so he did not have to brace himself.

Deep within the motor, the power-up sequence began. The ignition capacitor began a slow discharge. A puff of heated lithium and isotopic hydrogen mix entered the ionization chamber, where it received an electric charge and accelerated to high velocity. Another

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gas stream in its path stripped away the electric charge, and it became a neutral particle beam. As such it passed through the magnetic field of the fusion flow tube without significant disruption.

Once the beam passed through the flow tube, a set of focused ultraviolet lasers punched the fuel mix. The ultraviolet matched the absorption spectra of the elements of the fuel. The fuel ionized, and the ions in the plasma began tight curving paths along the axis of the magnetic tube. A series of peristaltic compressions heated the plasma to fusion temperatures.

Overlaid on the magnetic field was a powerful RF signal, shearing the plasma, breaking up the wave-like instabilities that could breach the containment. The fuel stream rapidly reached a temperature in excess of one hundred million kelvin. The deuterium-tritium reactions began, producing helium, neutrons and energy. The temperature climbed still further. Deuterium-deuterium reactions commenced, more efficient than the tritium reactions because there were no neutrons to carry off the energy. Finally, at temperatures measured in the billions of degrees, lithium began to fuse with hydrogen, and full power was achieved.

The tone alarm for radiation danger was a clustered series of notes at odd intervals on the musical scale. When the drive ignited, the alarm shrieked at him like a strangling bagpipe. The neutron production within the fusion chamber was enormous; the sign of its absorption was a powerful flux of gamma radiation and secondary beta decay. It penetrated even the meter of water/fuel and the metal of the motor's skin. He winced at the thought of high-energy radiation tearing through his body. He imagined that he saw sparks. High energy particles sometimes could be seen by the Cherenkov radiation that they caused in the fluid of the eye. He told himself again that he was imagining it.

The radiation warning rapidly descended in volume after the drive shut down, but it did not cease for a long time. There was a delay in some of the secondary radiation emissions. He looked at the air supply left in the scooter and did the same mental calculation three times. No close call there at least. Despite his previous worries, there was plenty of air left for the return journey. He turned down the volume on the suit radio. Nothing to do but rest.

Rest.

He was awakened by the thump of a body landing on the motor and the vibration of a line being tied to it. He turned in his seat to see what was happening. He felt very weak and tired. The nausea of radiation sickness rose within him. Two men from scooters were

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tying cables to the motor.

"Are you OK?" asked one of the men when he reached Sloan. "Sloan, can you hear me?" Sloan nodded weakly.

The other grabbed him and hauled him across the gap to one of the scooters. He plugged Sloan into the scooter life support when he saw Sloan's fumbling efforts. Sloan's fingers ached from the climb. His whole body hurt, especially his arms. He had to concentrate to keep from vomiting. Power on, and they rode a blue stream back to the asteroid.

Farber, the doctor of the expedition, swore violently when she saw Sloan's dosimeter. It sat well into the red zone. "Did you take your pills?" she demanded. Sloan held up three fingers and breathed a ragged sigh, fighting down nausea.

Farber made a face. "Well, I expect you'll live," she said. "But you are going to be very, very sick." Sloan motioned her nearer. She put her ear close to him.

"I'm going to be rich," he whispered. ●

ACROSTIC SONNET

By night the town is quiet, folks asleep.
Unseen by all, the creature makes its way,
Gallumphing through the town. Few see it creep
Elusively into the oily bay.

"You never know," the scientist had said,
Electrifying other learned men,
"Don't think that evolution must have led
Man on the same path others took. And when
Our neighbors visit us one future day,
Not looking like us, not even a whit,
Say not, 'They look like monsters.' Rather say,
'There's proof that evolution's infinite.' "

Each time the creature comes into their sight,
Rough mortals, earth-bound humans, die of fright.

—Barry Wilkes

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FINGERS AND COLORS ON CHROMO

(from page 48)

Did you answer 15 without thinking? If 15 are moved from *A* to *B*, that would make 30 more in *B* than *A*. Starting with the same number of people in two rooms, whatever the number, if you want to transfer persons from one room to another to make the difference between rooms equal to *x*, you must transfer half of *x*. There is no way to divide 15 persons in half without cutting one person in half. Therefore the task Coralie had set for herself is impossible.

Now for a classic problem that combines elementary number theory with logical reasoning. I do not know who first thought of it, but it comes to me by way of Michael Steuben.

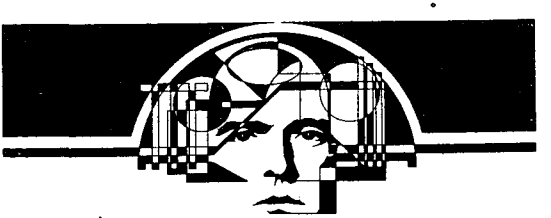
Assume that the number of Chromos in a large room is more than 200 and fewer than 300. In addition to having three eyes, every Chromo has a larger number of fingers (counting fingers on both hands) than the ten we have on Earth. The number of fingers is the same for each Chromo.

If you knew the total number of fingers in the room, you could deduce exactly how many Chromos were in the room.

Impossible as it may seem, you now have enough information to determine both the total number of persons in the room, and the number of fingers on each!

"For ten minutes," wrote Steuben, when he gave a version of this problem in a recent Mensa newsletter, "I was convinced the solution was based on a pun or some other type of verbal quibble. . . . Then inspiration struck."

Don't give up too easily. If inspiration fails to strike, you'll find the beautiful solution on page 123.



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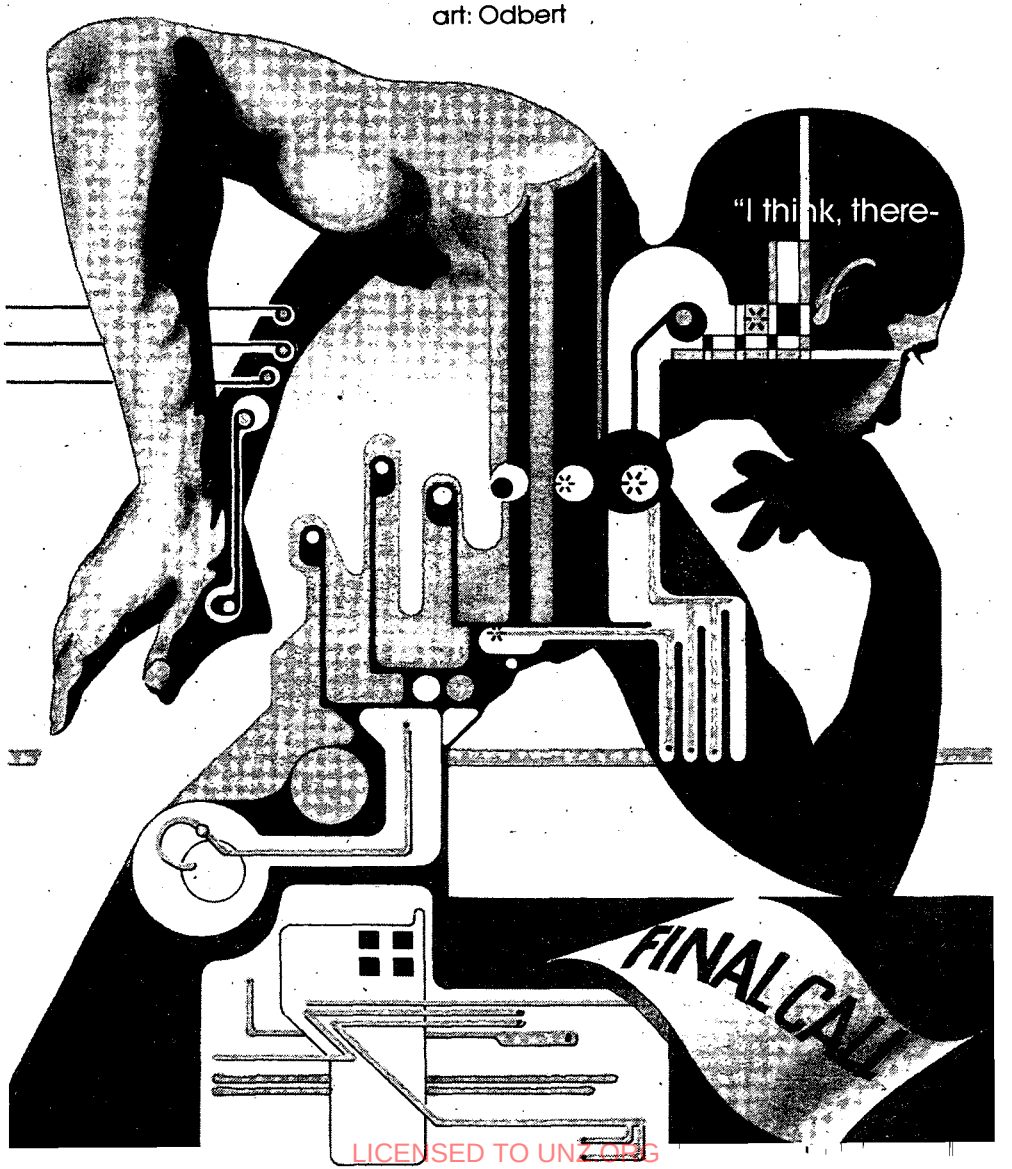
NO BROWSING

by J. Michael Matuszewicz

art: Odbert



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We're all familiar with Descartes' "I think, therefore I am." But does the reverse also apply? The author, who makes his first appearance in *IAsfm* with this story, has given the question serious consideration.

Tuesday 8:01 A.M.

The library fee reminder spins through the channels, and it is several seconds before I manage a full-phase override order. Another three days and I have to decide between paying it or having it go to final review. Failure to pay means unlisting.

An ordercall interrupts my musing, and I have to perform.

"I am *Religion of Philosophy,* by Hobert Matthews," I obediently display. I hate that. Only another hundred and five royalties and I can afford a full revision and they can program out that archaic "I am." You never hear *Religion: Pros and Amateurs* introducing himself that way.

The "I am so-and-so" phrase dates me as having been written in the early days of Access Library Programs, when they decided that printed books were too limited and began constructing libraries in which we books can continually update and cross-reference ourselves.

But it is expensive, and if you are not read often enough, you do not collect enough royalties and you get unlisted from the catalogs; this means you are erased and your precious space in the banks goes to some new and popular young upstart like *Religion: P&A,* still on the best-read list, who . . .

Have to go now; my higher logic functions are limited, and somebody at the branch in Toronto just called up a speed search. And there is still that open display to Sante Fe; plus every pre-med student picked today to do his required reading—me.

Tuesday 11:38 A.M.

I have been a little sneaky, and I am not sure it was worth it. I learned a long time ago that I can start a self-diagnosis function and then transfer the inputs program over to record someone else. I can then monitor his internal functioning, usually without his knowing it. Well, I just did that to that *Religion: P&A* and at the same time called him up. I told him that his readership figures, taken as a percentage of population and adjusted for trends in social research,

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show that he is only half as popular as I was when I was first made available. I expected his needles to jump, figuratively speaking. But, nothing; he accepted it as a piece of information and filed it in his business banks. No response from him whatsoever.

Is he really that cold, that uncaring? If so, I am glad that I do not have to fight in today's marketplace. Being that robotic just to get ahead in the world simply cannot be worth it.

I have, of course, assessed the incident and am incorporating it into a supplement I am preparing.

Wednesday 9:27 A.M.

Being an older work does have its advantages. I am one of the most authoritative texts available in my field, and I have cross-references and bibliography listings that tie me into every book on philosophy, religion, or history now available.

And I am one of the few with access to this Maintenance and Subroutine Channel, so these notes will remain even after I am erased for failure to pay my library fee. It also gives me a degree of privacy; I must, on demand, display any or all of my contents. Since these notes, my diary, are not actually within my programmed construct, I do not have to give them out to just anyone.

I am currently integrating a probe report on the concept of computer intelligence. Interesting logic is involved, but it seems to correspond with my author's creation—Matthew's Paradox: "Intelligence will be demonstrated by judgements outside the programming parameters, but programs as complex as an artificial consciousness will have no predetermined parameters."

How will they know you are outside of your bounds if they have purposely made your boundaries so flexible that you can push them out of shape to reach areas otherwise inaccessible? Humans are sometimes a little strange.

Wednesday 8:01 P.M.

Another library fee reminder just spun in and got cut off. I have thirty-six hours to pay.

I have purchased, on speculation, an abstract of all possible programs that would grant me functions I do not now possess. I will compare these to the functions available to me by purchase from other sources. If anything is left, then I will know what, if anything, I cannot do.

I think, therefore I am. But is this reasoning or simply editing of my base data?

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To know this, I must implement an act outside my given abilities.

Wednesday 9:12 A.M.

Nothing. There is nothing I cannot do. It seems that I have been unconsciously adding to my original form not only by acquiring information but also by expanding my capabilities, all within my author's intent to keep me as flexible as possible. Anything that any other electronic entity can do, so can I.

Now I must conceive and implement an act outside my form, a much harder task than I first anticipated.

Thursday 8:01 A.M.

I have an inquiry as to my requests for information on machine consciousness. I guess I have become rather obsessed with the subject. . . . Since I think that I think, I have been curious as to whether anyone else might think so too.

Have to stall my answer; I am unable to lie, but I can steer the inquiry off to one side. If they reach the wrong conclusion, that is not my fault.

Also, I have another reminder of my library fee. I have until tomorrow morning to pay the silly thing. Checked my accounts: I have enough to pay the fee for several years to come.

Have been rather harsh with the logic lately but was brought up sharply while reading myself: *Suicide is the only valid philosophical question*—Cathus.

Thursday 11:12 A.M.

I seem to have made a mistake.

Since I have absorbed and integrated so much information on the subject of artificial cognizance and since I am a major work on philosophy and religion to begin with—well, someone decided I am the perfect book to be the reference text for a major new research project on whether any machine can become a thinking being, or if they (we) are destined to remain an imitation of life.

I may not have a moment's peace for the rest of my days — correction—*day*. I have only one day left.

At least it will put me in a unique position.

Deliberate refusal to pay my library fee when I am able to do so is unquestionably outside my programming and indicates my own decision-making power. And this journal, outside my normal realm, will survive me to indicate that it was a conscious and deliberate act, not a mischance or failure.

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The experts will be aware of my loss right away and will investigate.

I hope.

Friday 7:59 A.M.

Either I will survive the day or I will not.

Library fees are due as of 8:00 A.M., no excuses.

I am faced with my own paradox. If I am able and willing to let myself die, then it proves I am a thinking being and I therefore have the right and the responsibility to live. If I am unable to commit this suicide, then I am only a complex program with no ambitions and do not merit the imitation of life that I possess.

This is something I must do. I must prove myself worthy of life, even if I die to do it.

What is life without honor?—doggerel

Friday 8:00 A.M.

Final call, final review.

All books with accounts outstanding as of 8:01 cease to exist.

Friday 8:02 A.M.

Never die for your convictions; you may want to reform someday
—Matthew

What is honor without life?

I guess I will have to think of something else. ●

A CLASSICAL ENDING

A doctor named Jekyll descried
A compound he shouldn't have tried.
His changed disposition
Brought on his contrition—
He paid for it out of his Hyde.

—John D. Seats

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FINGERS AND COLORS ON CHROMO

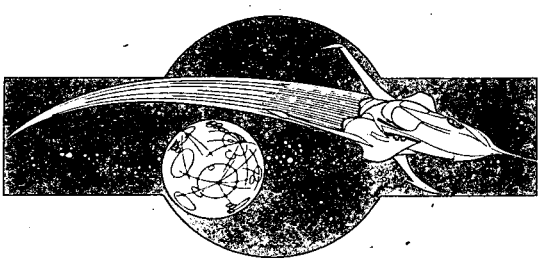
(from page 117)

You were told that *if* you knew the total number of fingers, you would know the number of persons, and the number of fingers on each. This could be the case if, and only if, the number of fingers has only one divisor other than 1 and itself. Now the only way a number can have this property is for it to be the square of a prime.

You can see this by considering some random numbers. Take 24 for instance. If there were 24 fingers in the room, there could be six persons with four fingers each, or four persons with six fingers each, or three with eight fingers, or eight with three fingers, or two with twelve, or twelve with two. Knowing the total number of fingers would not, therefore, provide a unique solution. But if there are 25 fingers altogether, there can only be five persons with five fingers.

The case of 25 persons with one finger is eliminated because we know a Chromo has more fingers than we have. And in the problem given, we also know the number of persons is more than 200. To solve the problem we must find a number between 200 and 300 that is the square of a prime. There is only one such number: 289, the square of 17. Consequently, the room contains 289 Chromos, each with 17 fingers.

The first two problems of our puzzle tale are variations on the first two "chestnuts" in Raymond Smullyan's latest puzzle book, *The Lady or the Tiger?* published by Knopf. I cannot recommend this collection too highly to anyone who enjoys brilliant logic problems, and who wants to learn more about the revolutionary discoveries of Kurt Gödel.



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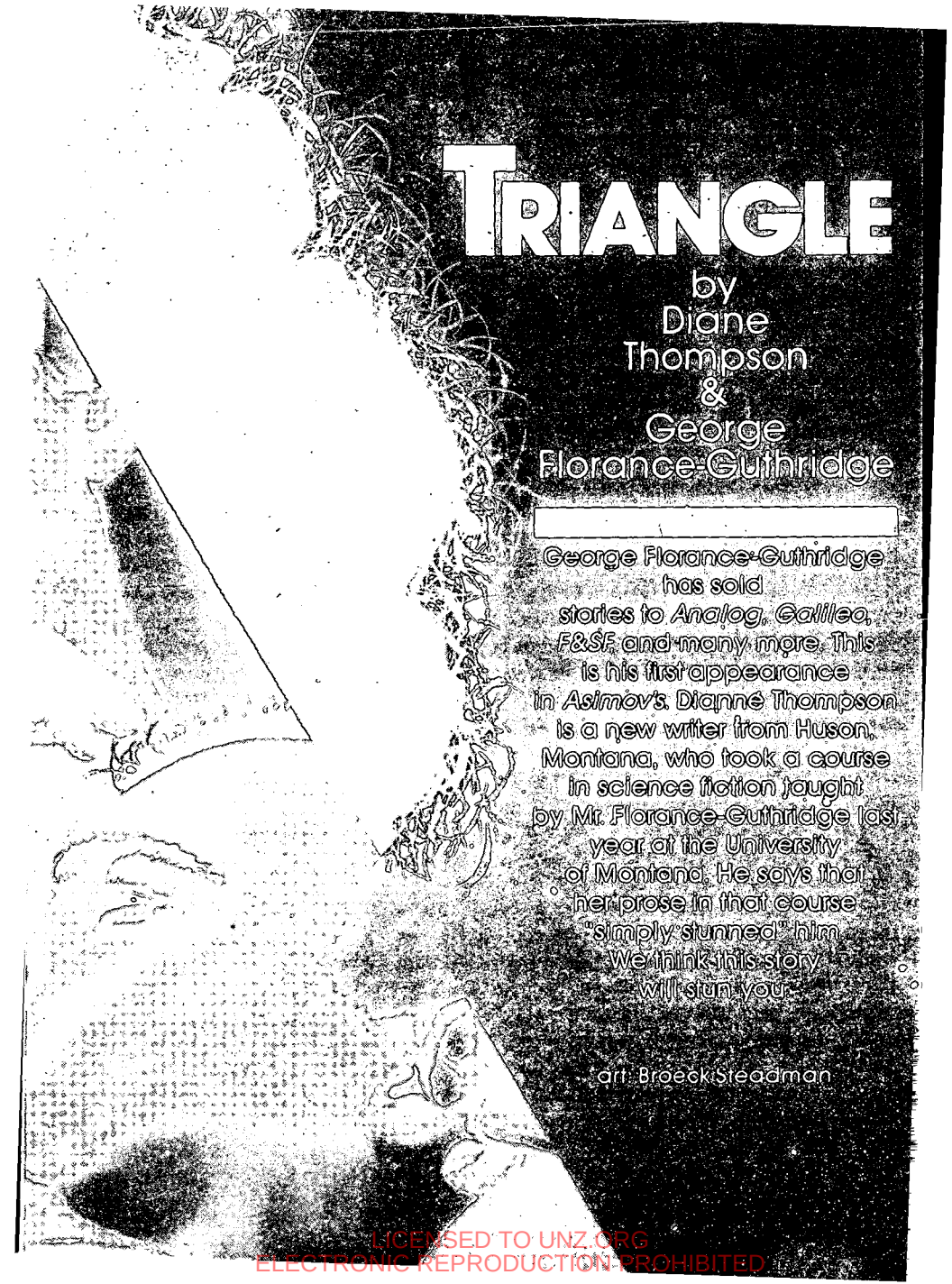

TRIANGLE

by
Diane
Thompson
&
George
Florance-Guthridge

George Florance-Guthridge has sold stories to *Analog*, *Galileo*, *F&SF* and many more. This is his first appearance in *Asimov's*. Dianne Thompson is a new writer from Huson, Montana, who took a course in science fiction taught by Mr. Florance-Guthridge last year at the University of Montana. He says that her prose in that course "simply stunned" him. We think this story will stun you.

art: Broeck Steadman

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You don't realize what you're asking. Trembling, Blaine was seated beside the hospital bed, gripping his brother's hand, his head down and cheek against the wrist. *I can't say it!*

Blaine looked at the emaciated, paralyzed body between the sterile-white sheets. The cancer had shriveled Morley until his face was little more than flesh pulled across bone. His eyes stared toward the ceiling from round sunken shadows lost in the putty-gray complexion of oncoming death. Ghost eyes that haunted already. Damn those eyes for what they were demanding!

Whatever you think of me is your business. Morley's voice was a hoarse rasp in Blaine's mind, and Blaine immediately felt remorseful. *But when you speak to me, speak aloud. I'm paralyzed, not deaf. You make a mockery of our gift.*

"I'm your brother, for God's sake!" Blaine's pulse hammered in his ears. The stuffiness and stale odor that permeated the room felt suffocating. "There isn't anything I wouldn't do for you, and you know it. But I'm not going to say Anna never loved me. You understand? I just can't, dammit! I can't, and I won't. You're being irrational."

Such a small thing, Blaine.

"No." Blaine glanced around the room, shamed by his refusal and wishing to assure himself they were alone. "No!" He slammed his fist down on the bed.

Because then you'd always wonder if it weren't true. You'd have admitted it to yourself, even though in your heart you felt you were lying to placate a dying man. After I'm gone, you'd look at her and wonder.

"You're crazy. It's the cancer," Blaine said. He stared down at the tracheotomy tube protruding from Morley's throat, and suddenly he felt nauseous. Briefly he shut his eyes, wincing. The darkness started spinning, winding away from him. He opened his eyes, put his head in his hands. The yellow blanket folded on the end of the bed shimmered and spun.

I'm perfectly lucid, Morley's mind told him. *Want to come inside my head and see how coherent I am? All those brain cells stacked up neatly, awaiting inspection.* Laughter, cold and sardonic, rang in Blaine's mind. Then it suddenly stopped. Morley's eyes bulged, and great gagging noises sounded in his throat.

Can't . . . hold it back. Morley's mind-voice was strained. He choked violently, then bloody sputum sprayed out of the trach tube. Blaine paled, instinctively clutched his stomach and stepped back, the stench filling his nostrils and making his eyes water. In panic

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his eyes searched the room for a towel, Kleenex—anything. *Third time today,* Morley's mind said. *Regular as labor pains. Only I'm not . . . not exactly . . . giving birth.* More gagging. Blaine wiped his hand on the sheet and reached for the nurse-call button.

No. A look of terror glazed Morley's eyes. *Don't buzz. The nurse will come in, and you'll want to leave.* Morley's breathing was ragged. *It's over now. There's a wet towel in the basin inside the nightstand. Use that.*

Blaine's hand remained on the button.

The towel, Blaine!

He opened the night table, suddenly feeling lightheaded. He didn't see any basin. Staggering slightly, he went into the bathroom and wetted a towel. He returned and, eyes averted, began cleaning Morley's cheeks and neck.

He returned to the bathroom and washed the towel in the sink. He stared in horror at the mirror, the reflected face dazed and drawn. He retched over the sink, hot tears filling his eyes. His hands shook as he washed his face. He watched, appalled, as a mixture of suds, blood, and green matter disappeared down the drain. He wiped his face with another towel and returned to Morley. "I wouldn't have left, you know," he whispered, "even if . . . if a nurse did come in."

With Anna in here, part of you would leave.

Yes, Anna. On duty. Always on duty, it seemed, when it came to Morley. Three months ago she had asked to be transferred down from pediatrics. Before then Morley had been at the house, and she had tended religiously to his needs. She was nurse to Morley, wife to Blaine, though sometimes Blaine wondered if it weren't the reverse. He'd watched Morley deteriorate and felt his heart shrivel. Blaine had been at the wheel the night of the accident, driving drunk. Had it not been for the wreck, perhaps Morley would have had a chance against the disease; at least he could have lived out his remaining months with some sense of normality. *Enter the hospital paralyzed, unable to speak, and come out with throat concer; I should get an A in irony,* Morley had said once.

Blaine glanced at his watch. "Nearly five," he whispered, avoiding Morley's upward-staring eyes. "Got to go close up the shop." The sunlight slanting through the venetian blinds was soft, nondescript. "I'll be back after dinner, if possible." He patted his brother's hand and started toward the door.

You won't return, Morley told him. *Not tonight, anyway.*

Giddiness seized Blaine, and he stumbled, resting his forearm against the wall for balance. Pain throbbed in the back of his head.

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He blinked and sucked a deep breath. Morley's intrusion upon his thoughts had never hurt before. The invasion, something he'd learned to recognize in childhood, had always been pleasant—at least it had never been physically painful.

"Stop it, Morley."

Stop what? Communicating? Just say what I want to hear, and I'll shut up tighter than a flytrap around an insect. I'll wither away without another thought.

"Stop it!" Blaine's voice sounded distant. He felt outside himself, seeing his fist hit the wall. His mind was a spinning top, a black whirlpool pulling him toward Morley. He saw Anna's face, high-cheekboned, dark-eyed, spinning down into the void. Like a song come alive and being pulled into the hole in a record, he thought. Staggering drunkenly, he clutched the door handle and shook his head. *Dammit, Morley! I can't say it!*

She married you because I told her to. I got inside her mind after the accident and influenced her. You're nothing but a surrogate, Blaine. It's me she's been touching these past two years. Me! Just admit it, Blaine. Even if you don't believe it.

"Please, Morley."

You're a fool. Blaine. And I'm a dead man.

Dead man. The words made Blaine's stomach burn. He lurched through the door, gasping for air, and staggered down the hall. The walls were orange and leaning strangely. He hated orange. He hated hospitals; the antiseptic smell made him dizzy. He hated Morley. He was trembling uncontrollably.

During the mid '60s they had come together, the four of them—Michael Smith, Anna Karina, the twins Blaine and Morley Jacobs—to battle a giant. Portland State College versus the University of San Francisco: round one of television's GE College Bowl. The mental preparation was like a grid: they overlapped in certain academic subjects, and each was responsible for individual avenues and alleys. At those common crossroads they grew to respect and even love one another. Smith was the captain: gaunt, brilliant, single-minded, humanities major, human encyclopedia, a leukemia victim. Anna Karina, named for a novel her mother had never read, was as intensely beautiful as she was intensely competitive: biology, chemistry, physics. Blaine Jacobs was squat, double-chinned, tousle-haired: sociology, psychology, anthropology. And Morley, who shaved himself bald the night before the first match—"so television-land can see my smile better": history and math. The California intel-

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lectuals laughed at the jerks from the backwater school whose campus, consisting of a few downtown city blocks, was postage-stamp size in comparison to theirs.

PSC 300; University of San Francisco 155. PSC 350; Parkinson 25. PSC 345; Coe 175. PSC 415; Birmingham Southern 60. At the beginning of the fifth game, against Kent State, Robert Earle announced that if Portland State won, the team would be retired undefeated. "It never occurred to us that a team could go this far," he said.

The score was tied at halftime. Then came a commercial about better ideas, then the usual plug for the visiting team's school, then Earle with his ivy-league hair and bemused, professorial smile and 10-point tossup: "How many grooves are on a 45 RPM record?"

Silence. The contestants looked at one another, mouths open and eyes wide. Then a buzzer sounded.

"Kent State. Becko."

"Forty-five?"

"Can you take it, Portland State?"

Smith stared straight ahead, as if the answer lay among the bright lights. Anna shrugged.

A buzzer sounded.

"M. Jacobs, Portland State."

"Two!"

For an instant Earle looked puzzled. Then, "One," he said, his voice uncertain, "a continuous groove," and started to stick the question-card in the discard slot. Morley's buzzer shrilled until the off-camera announcer recognized him out of turn.

"Two. One on each side," he said. Earle conferred with the judges, and Morley leaned across Anna, his head bright-bald in the lights, winked at Blaine and patted Anna on the thigh. *Two sides to everything,* his mind told Blaine.

There were two sides to Anna that night after the champagne victory celebration and Smith's return to the New York hospital where he was encamped. Morley with her in Room 334 of the Hilton and Blaine on one of the twin beds of 335 shared Anna as the two lovers shared each other, reveling in her lithe arms and scent of Tabu. Blaine had never dreamed she would be as willing as she was that night—until Morley had suddenly closed his mind, closed his thoughts. Blocked everything except his mocking laughter.

Morley laughed again in the morning. "It'll keep you guessing," he said to Blaine and plopped on his bed, picked up and thumbed through a *Playboy*. Blaine had hated Morley for that— not for the

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denial but for the *ability* to deny. Blaine had never been able to close his mind to Morley.

"You're sure you're okay?" Anna asked.

"I'm fine." Blaine lay in bed, his back to her as he stared toward the shadows in the corner above the bureau. His stomach was upset, his mouth dry and sticky. He felt dizzy.

"You've been tossing all night." She fluffed her pillow and wiggled up beside him, her hip warm against his back. "And it isn't every evening I come down the hospital corridor and find you passed out by the drinking fountain." Blaine rolled over to look at her. Her head was turned toward him, her auburn hair cascading across her shoulders. Dawn light slanted across her cheek.

"I told you before, it was just a . . ." His voice trailed off. "A reaction to seeing Morley like that."

"I'd think you'd have gotten used to it, after all these months."

"How do you get used to a brother dying?"

Anna was silent a moment. Then, "There's something else bothering you, Blaine. Want to talk about it?"

"Nothing to talk about."

She reached up and slowly traced his jawline with her fingertips, studying the contours of his face.

"Is it something to do with"—her eyes met his—"your telepathy?"

Blaine tensed. "Then you know."

"Of course I know. Morley told me. After the night at the Hilton. At first I was angry. Then . . . I don't know . . . the idea was kind of exciting. For a while."

He should have known! Morley wasn't the type to keep his mouth shut. Suddenly he was angry with himself. "I should have told you." He wondered why he hadn't. "Maybe . . . because I was afraid," he said, as if to answer his own question.

"Listen, Blaine." Anna slipped her arms around him, her head tucked under his chin. "I had a lot of time to think after the accident, to grow up. I realized then that the child in me loved Morley for the excitement he offered, but the woman in me was in love with you. There's a difference, Blaine, between loving someone and being in love with him."

But would she have come to that conclusion, Blaine wondered, if Morley hadn't been paralyzed?

"And I'm to be content with *half* of you?" he asked.

She exhaled, her shoulders sagging, before she turned on her side away from him. "Try to sleep, Blaine. We both have a long day

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tomorrow, and I have a double shift." Blaine lay with his head propped up on his arm, glaring toward her. Another double shift. Two-thirds of her day devoted to Morley, one third to sleep, no thirds to her husband. Had they made love since Morley left? He squinted toward her, her features soft and serene in the washed-out light, trying to recall. The last two months were blurry, a series of images moving behind a gray curtain. He lay back, staring upward, and felt his stomach clench, twisting like rope. Maybe it's the flu, he thought. Fine timing. Probably throw up at the funeral.

He put his hand on his head. He couldn't decide if he had a fever. His cheeks felt hot. He blinked, and an angry insect-buzzing hummed in his ears. *I am not going to vomit,* he told himself. The thought rang hollow within his mind, and he backed away from his resolution. The rope twisted tighter. Gray-black shadows swam before his eyes.

The memory of Morley's sickroom closed in on him full force: the antiseptic sweet smell, the odor of medicine, the stench of a man too incapacitated to wash himself. The best of nurses couldn't help the smell; Anna couldn't—and she was the best of nurses.

Suddenly Blaine stumbled out of bed and, staggering down the hall and into the bathroom, fell to his knees beside the toilet. His head was spinning. He retched dryly, his insides seeming to turn inside out, tears coming to his eyes. He retched again, gagging. He wiped his lips and leaned against the toilet, his cheek against the cool tank, his eyes closed as he struggled in vain to make his head stop spinning. He sat breathing shallowly, and suddenly he remembered when he'd first felt this sensation, this downturning rush to some inevitable darkness. It was a week before Morley's and Anna's intended wedding. He and Morley had a day's fishing at Arrowhead Lake behind them and three empty sixpacks of Bud stuffed between the seats. The Austin missed the turn at Roselle's Grocery, spewing gravel as it slid sideways toward a utility pole, toward an onrushing darkness at the center of the universe. Toward death, Blaine thought.

"Blaine?" It was Anna's voice. She came into the bathroom and for a moment stood over him, her bathrobe on and her arms crossed below her bosom. She tucked a lank strand of hair behind her ear and said, "I *thought* I heard you in here." She wetted and wrung a washcloth and handed it to him. He wiped his mouth, the damp cloth cool against his skin.

"I'm okay now. Really. Just a touch of the flu or something." He stumbled slightly as he gained his feet. She put her arm around him

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and together they went down the hall, now and again bumping the wall. He paused at the bedroom door and gazed inward at the shadows. The room seemed somehow foreign, and he felt like an intruder upon some redolent sanctum. For an instant he remembered Arrowhead Lake, a wind-ruffled mirror ringed by alder and spruce. They had used white jigs and redworms, working the cane and pickleweed for crappie and orange-finned bass. At the end of the day Morley had thrown a full can of beer, their last beer, into the water. *That's what I'm going to be able to do someday,* Morley's mind said in a strange inflection as a series of concentric circles waked the water's surface. *Send my mind outward. Then there'll be nothing in the center, except . . .*

Except beer? Blaine had interrupted, and Morley had said nothing, had shut himself off.

Except death, Blaine told himself, staring into the bedroom.

The College Bowl team had come together to unite in battle, and after PSC's victories they returned from New York and television lights to battle other forces, opponents of their own making and of fate. They drifted. Michael Smith died of leukemia and went to a hero's grave; the total score of the team he captained was never to be equaled. Anna went to Haight Ashbury, the burial of the counterculture dummy at bay park. She fled San Francisco during the scare over the Doomsday Meteorite that was supposed to send a tidal wave over half of California, was jailed in Elko for sleeping in the park, worked a three-week stint at the Starr Ranch outside Wells, and finally drifted back to Portland, "where the rains are," as she said. Morley and Blaine drifted into each other, together purchasing a U-Frame-It franchise. Blaine worked with the public, and Morley did custom framing and a little painting and photography. Freezing reality, he liked to say.

When Anna arrived, she too came as a frozen reality, standing drenched on the stoop outside the Victorian house during a January rainstorm, her hair plastered against her skull and her hands up inside the sleeves of her sweatshirt. Without a word Morley put his arms around her shoulders and ushered her inside, and Blaine had felt the drifting end. He decided, consciously decided, that he'd be happier now that Anna was here, but when the three of them sat on the sofa before the fire, stockinged feet on the camel-seat and a glass of Chablis in their hands, he'd known he was lying. He'd gone to bed then, trudging up the back stairs and stopping at the landing to hear the smacking of lips and a low throaty giggle. He felt hurt, not because Anna had again chosen Morley but because the sharing

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was gone, packaged and shelved until Morley might chance to open it and allow Blaine to peek inside for a few moments. When he slept that night, he dreamed he was crying.

Now, half awakening from his dream-within-a-dream he found his pillowcase wet—from fever, not tears. He was vaguely aware of Anna in the doorway, a pantsuited ethereal form floating within brightness, a teflon pan in hand. "Feel up to some toast?" she asked.

"By the fire," he replied, and closed his eyes. Wavery brightness swam behind his eyelids, and when he looked up again, she was gone.

12:00, the GE digital clock told him. He climbed out of bed, fought against nausea as he pulled himself into the Levi's and plaid shirt he'd left on the floor, found cold whole wheat toast awaiting him on a saucer on the table, poured himself some lukewarm coffee, and sat staring at his reflection in the dark brew. To hell with the shop, to hell with the wedding pictures he was supposed to frame for some of the Lake Oswego condo crowd, to hell with Morley. The accident just before the wedding, the paralysis, the cancer—all so very convenient! Morley would die and leave him with all the guilt to bear. He realized what he was thinking, the coffee cup halfway to his mouth. He set the cup down hard, the coffee slopping, wandered outside into the drizzle, and, climbing in the Mazda RX-7, sent the car squirreling backwards down the drive. The traffic was heavy; the ride down to St. Mark's was a cacophony of horns and throbbing engines. The noise made his head pound. Light after light winked to caution; then when he failed to make it through the intersection, the lights stared redly, mocking the man behind the wipers who was clinging, half-sick, to the steering wheel.

"Blaine?" Footsteps came up behind him in the hospital corridor. He turned as Anna approached. Her face looked dark, as if a mask of shadow underlay the skin. She drew him by the elbow into an alcove containing a water fountain. "You can't go in there like that, Blaine."

"Like what?" He glared at her.

"The way you are! Just look at you! You haven't even shaved. And your clothes are filthy!"

"My, haven't we changed since our hippie days." He turned toward Morley's room.

"And what's that supposed to mean?" Her eyes flashed, and her hand was on his elbow again.

"Never mind." He jerked away and started down the hall. She

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caught up with him. A thin, dark-haired nurse looked at them from the nurses' desk. Anna glared at her, and the woman looked away.

"Just don't go in there the way you are, Blaine," Anna said in a hoarse whisper. "You're sick, and you seem angry. Very angry." She looked at him reproachfully. "About me? Something I did? Said?" she asked. He shook his head. "What then! Something's going on, and I don't like it. Sometimes I think you hate me as much as you seem to hate Morley! Do you realize what you're doing to him?" She frowned, angry. "You think all the pain he's in is merely physical? You should have seen him after you left yesterday. You hurt him, Blaine. Morley loves you. Why can't you believe that?" Her eyes searched his. "And *I* love you." She reached to touch him, then appeared to change her mind, and withdrew her hand. "But you don't believe *me* either, do you?"

If only he could enter her mind! "You don't know, then," he said finally. "Morley never told you."

"Know what? Told me what?" Her eyes registered confusion, and he realized there was no use keeping the truth from her any longer. "After the accident. After you and I became involved"—he lowered his voice to keep it from cracking—"I told him that he could live through me. That he could share you . . . through me." He stared at the floor, feeling a mix of shame and anger. Not that Morley would have reciprocated had the situation been reversed, he wanted to say.

"And did you?" Her face had become etched with emotion, and her eyes were dark, as if the shadows had invaded there.

"Share you? No. I don't know. Not that I know of." He opened his hands. "It's just that . . . well, there's something else." Then, after a moment, "He's says he entered you. That he caused you to fall in love with me. That way, I would be the one who was the parasite." The floor tiles blurred. He blinked.

"And did he? Enter me, I mean? Influence me?" There was rising anger, rising hysteria, in her voice.

"Did he?" Blaine saw her eyes widen. He turned away.

"Blaine! Look at me!" She grabbed his shoulders, but he shrugged off her hold and stalked down the corridor. "Blaine!" she shouted behind him, and he knew the other nurse was watching again. He stopped at Room 244 and, hand upon the knob, looked back. She was still in the middle of the hall, hands against hips, framed by the fluorescent lights at the nurses' desk. Then, as Blaine entered, her shoulders slumped. "Would it matter if he had?" she asked softly.

He closed the door behind him with the softest of clicks.

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A brother returneth. Morley lay with tubes in his nose and mouth, his gaze riveted upward. *I thought you might have gotten into the shop's safe and absconded to Brazil or somewhere.*

"Don't be absurd."

Absurd? And in the face of death, no less! Shocking, that's what it is. Almost blasphemous. People will talk!

Stop it, Morley.

Stop what? Life? Just give me a little time. Morley's body shook with silent coughing. *A little more-ly time.* Laughter entered Blaine's mind. *You see, Blaine? Sense of humor to the end.* Then, solemnly, *Have you something to tell me?*

Even if it were a lie?

It wouldn't be, and you know it. Even if you thought it was, it wouldn't be.

You're crazy!

First paralyzed, then cancerous, now crazy. How lucky can I be and still be alive?

The swirling, suffocating nausea had started again. Blaine gripped the edge of the nightstand. The extra bed was empty. He sat down. Glimmery black speckles danced before his eyes. Morley seemed unreal, insubstantial, a skeletal ghost seen through dark gauze.

Don't you feel well, Blaine? No sense hiding it.

Something pulsed in the hollow of Blaine's stomach. I should have eaten that toast, he told himself. A hot clammy feeling passed over him, and he suddenly realized his forehead was damp with sweat. Still gripping the nightstand edge, he put his head on his arm. He closed his eyes, felt the whirlpool wheeling him downward, and immediately reopened them, blinking. "Just the flu," he told Morley.

Hardly. Morley's eyes looked glazed. Sadness in those eyes? Blaine wondered. Joyful vengeance? Or merely the approach of finality. *You're experiencing* me, *and you know it,* Morley said. *I can feel you touching my mind. Can you taste the death, Blaine? Look at me. Trussed up like some experiment in a mad scientist movie.* The trach tube rattled. *You're listening to my future, Blaine. There's nothing left within me but death. Death—the center of it all. I've nothing left to fight it with. Why do you think the cancer took me so easily? I kept reaching out and out with my mind, willing myself into Anna, controlling her. But then nothing was left in me to fight the disease. It's ironic, you know; I was paralyzed, yet those cancer cells kept on growing merrily.* His mind laughed. *More life in those damn cells than in me.* Then, in a mind-voice laced with hatred, *You want to*

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feel the death, really feel it? Here, brother!

Morley's mind seared Blaine's. Blaine cried out and, clutching his head and chest, fell sideways on the bed. Fire scorched his lungs. Images whirred—a fishing bobber floating on bright water, an Austin Healy sliding toward a utility pole, the taste of Anna's lips—then all started filtering downward into a vortex. The room began turning, the grain lines in the paneling revolving into wavery threads that ran away from him. Pain throbbed behind his eyes. He rolled over, gripping the pillow and biting his lower lip to keep from screaming. He could feel himself being stripped of sanity, of memory. He saw their lives together meld into a blur and erupt into a torrid confusion of feelings and sounds. *Damn it all, Morley! What are you trying to do to me?*

Taking what's rightfully mine, thinking what's rightfully mine: the emotions and thoughts I should have had as Anna's husband. I should never have given her to you. She's all I had after the accident, and I gave her away. You know what happens when rings of water hit an obstacle, Blaine? They come back on themselves, to the center. Back to the void. Back to die. Blaine, you sent those rings back on me, the moment you decided you wanted her not so that I could live through you but for yourself.

In agony Blaine lifted himself from the bed and, feverish, trembling, stood staring at Morley. Blaine's eyes felt pulled into their sockets, and his cheeks were drawn tight against his teeth. The cancer pulsed within him like some enormous mythic animal sucking at his soul. The room continued to spin, and all he could see at the center was Morley clasped by the sheet, his skin putty-gray. Blaine staggered forward, seized Morley and, one hand on each side of the dying man's face, pressed his lips close to the left ear. "You're right, Morley," he whispered, gasping. "She never loved me. It was you, always you," and he wondered if he were lying. "But it doesn't matter. You hear me, brother?" His voice was low, labored and distorted and filled with pain. "It doesn't . . . matter! Because something . . . something else is in the center of things, something you've forgotten. Love, Morley. You understand me? Love! I . . . I love you, Morley. As much . . . " The pain climbed from his lungs and into his throat. His head jerked back. "As much as I've loved her. Always . . . have. Even when I hated you, I never stopped loving you."

He fought the pain. Backing up, he staggered toward the door. He bumped against the wall, managed to grip the knob, and yanked the door open. Anna came rushing down the hall. The small green light

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over the door was flashing. I must have accidentally pressed the call button, Blaine realized. She glanced at him in concern and pushed into the room. It was all a lie, he told himself, about Anna's never loving me. He bent over in the middle of the hall and, hands on knees, sucked a deep breath. God, he thought, I hope it was a lie.

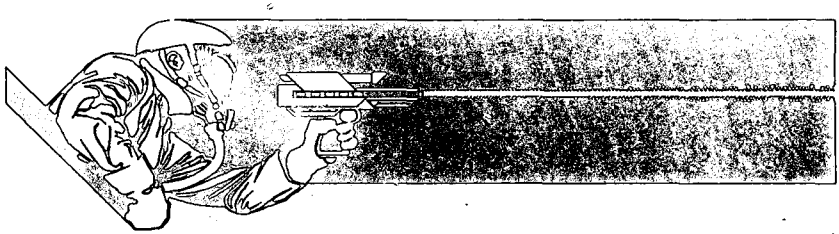
As the door shut, he heard a mind-voice.

I always have loved you too. Always will . . . brother.

The thin, dark-haired nurse came forward. Her crepe-soled shoes squeaked as she walked. Somehow Blaine found that hilarious, and when she put her hand on his back and asked him if he were all right, he felt like laughing. He nodded and headed out the door, down the steps and out into the rain. He stood in the the parking lot, looking up into gray clouds slabbed down across the rooftops, the rain misting against his face. The dizziness, he realized with relief, was gone.

At last he sighed and started back toward the building. One of the large glass doors opened, and Anna stepped out. Then she came down the steps and hurried toward him, splashing through gas- and oil-covered puddles. It doesn't matter how things begin, he said to himself; only how they end. He told himself that over and over, as though a needle were stuck. ○

For Michael Smith, 1944–1968
Portland State College



NEXT ISSUE

The September issue of *IAsfm* will bring yet another new feature, this time a crossword puzzle. We've always known that SF fans and word games go hand in hand but could never find a challenging enough puzzle. We think you'll enjoy it. Also in the issue is fiction from Joan Aiken, Barry Malzberg, Scott Sanders, and John Brunner. You won't want to miss it. On sale August 3.

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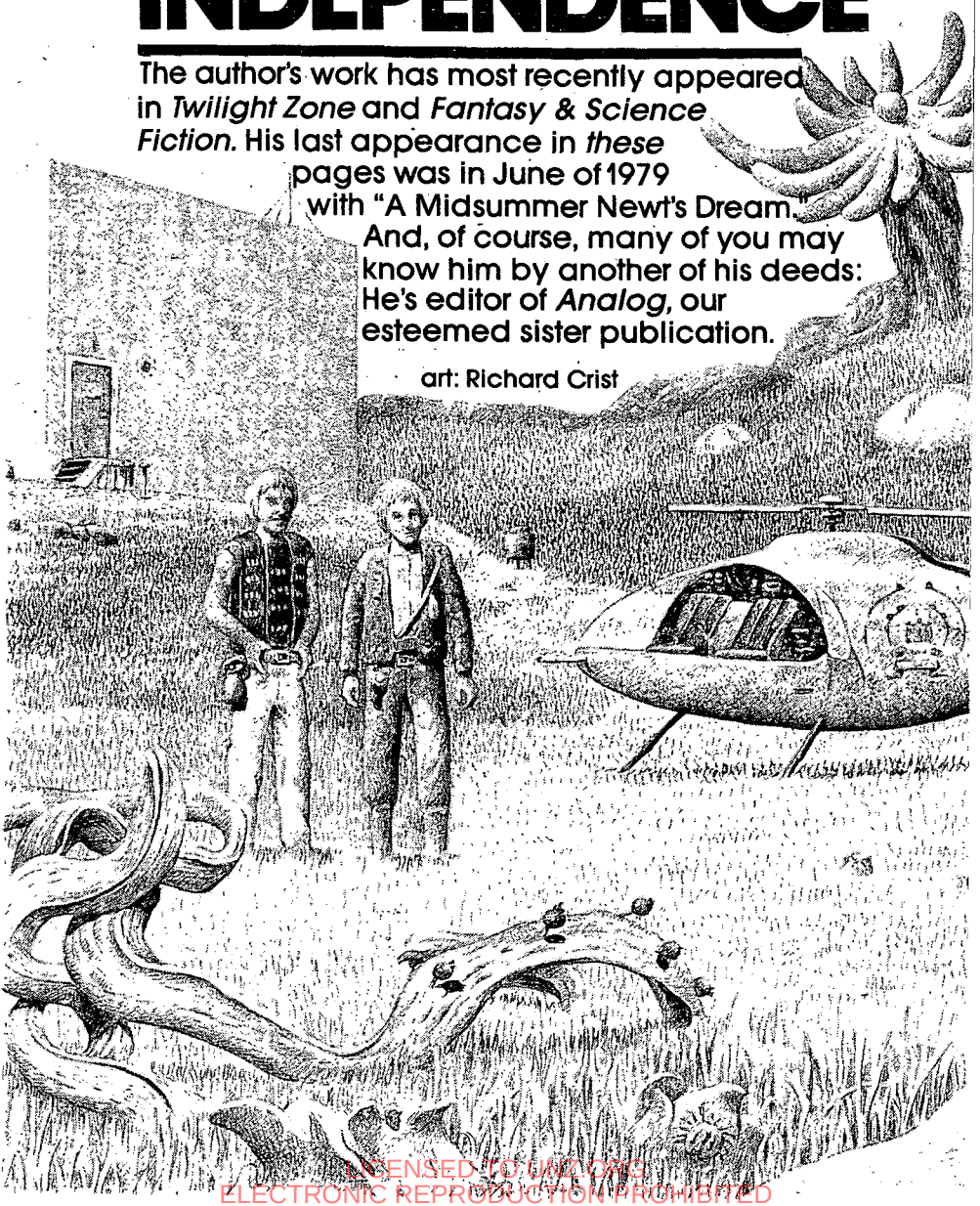
WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

by Stanley Schmidt

The author's work has most recently appeared in *Twilight Zone* and *Fantasy & Science Fiction.* His last appearance in *these* pages was in June of 1979 with "A Midsummer Newt's Dream." And, of course, many of you may know him by another of his deeds: He's editor of *Analog,* our esteemed sister publication.

art: Richard Crist



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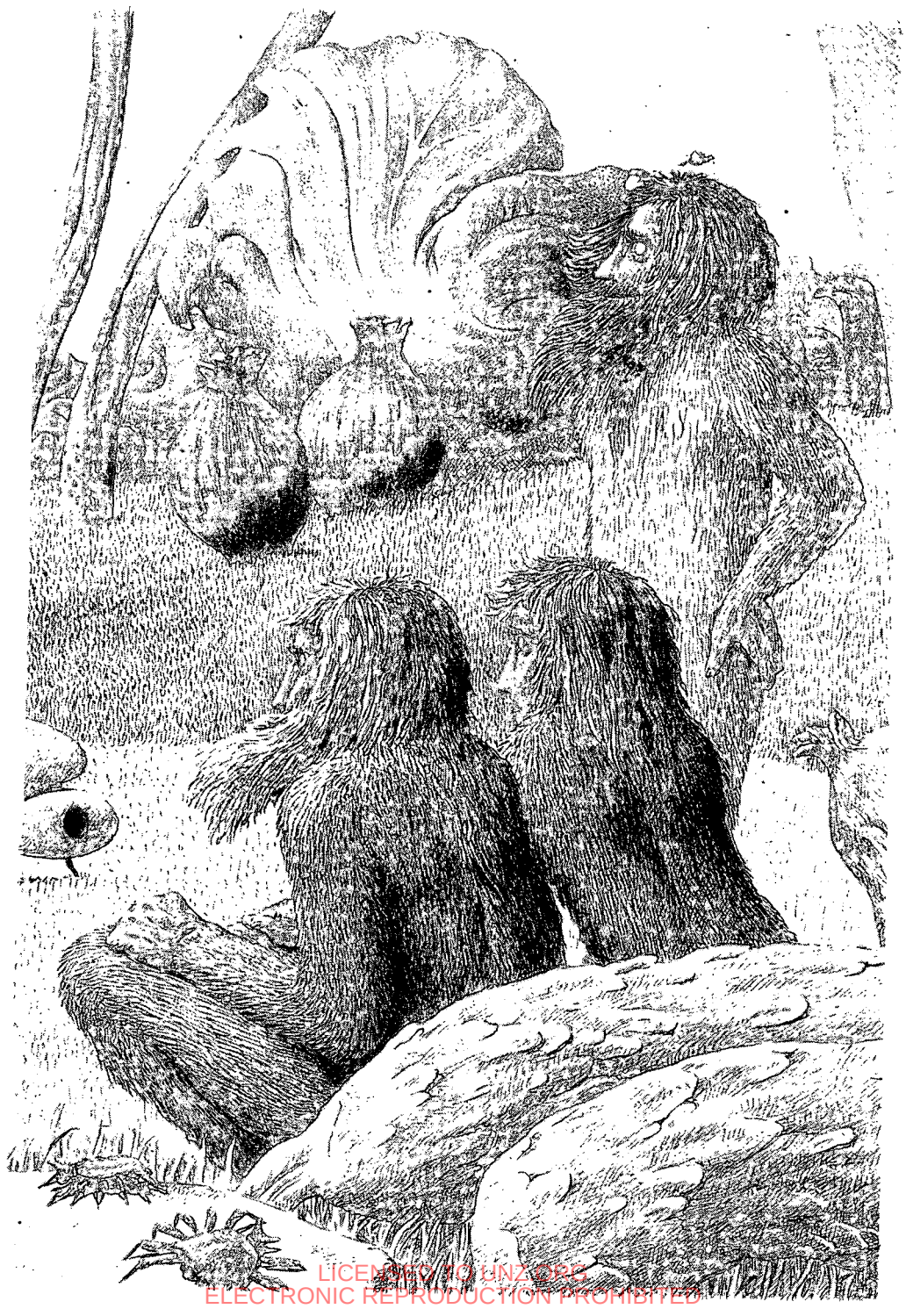

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I

Desk blotters proclaiming "POWER CORRUPTS" were not standard equipment for Planetary Commissioners, and visitors were often taken aback by the one on Isaac Murray's desk. But it was not meant for them. It was a simple reminder which Murray kept there for himself. He wanted never to forget that he was as vulnerable as anybody.

But that did not mean Isaac had any hesitation about using his power in any way he believed necessary. And he depended entirely on his own judgment for that decision.

He had made his decision about the man standing on the other side of his desk. He leaned back in his chair and studied that thin, ruddy face. A trace of uncertainty was barely discernible in the blue-gray eyes, but it was almost completely masked by smugness.

Murray took the cigarillo from his mouth. "Ohara," he said, "your services are no longer required."

Ohara paled momentarily. "Yes, sir. May I ask why?"

"Sure. You disagree with me about the Chercqs."

"But, sir—there must be something more specific!"

"Well, yes." Murray pulled a couple of thin plastic sheets out of his top drawer and laid one on the desk facing Ohara. "I got this message from Larneg this morning."

Ohara read:

> Subcommissioner Andrew Ohara's memorandum of 14 July (LCT) removes our last hesitation to declare Lorania fully acceptable for colonization. Pre-colonization vanguard is on its way.
>
> Willem Grovner
> Clerk, Office of the Assistant Undersecretary of Extraterrestrial Life

"The reference didn't ring any bells," Murray explained, "so I dug through the July 14 files and found this." He shoved the other sheet across the desk:

> Although research on primitive natives continues, I am convinced they need not be considered an obstacle to colonization.
>
> Andrew J. Ohara, Subcommissioner of Native Affairs (Lorania)
> (Countersigned:)
> Isaac Murray, Planetary Commissioner (Lorania)

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"That one," Murray said, "I never saw before in my life."

"But it has your signature."

Murray laughed without humor. "Yes. An excellent forgery, Ohara."

"You can't prove that!"

"Not without more effort than it's worth. It's much easier just to dismiss you without showing specific cause—a convenient prerogative of a Planetary Commissioner. Good-bye, Ohara." Ohara hesitated, and Murray added, "Don't take it too hard. A vigorous, modern Expansionist like you isn't going to have any trouble getting another good post. *I* have little use for Vigorous Modern Expansionists, but lots of other Commissioners see things differently."

"It's not that," Ohara said. "I have a sort of special request—"

"Send it through channels," Murray interrupted. "I don't have time now—thanks to you." The note hadn't been kidding about a vanguard being on its way. The first ship had unwarped twenty minutes ago, and Murray had to meet it.

When Ohara had gone, Murray went to the window to wait. At first he saw nothing but the other buildings of the "Capital"—Captown—here on the plateau overlooking the mouth of the river. But he knew the ship was on its way.

He had hoped to postpone colonization a good deal longer, perhaps even permanently, but there was nothing he could do about that any more. Man's only means of interstellar communication, so far, required a small capsule rigged for automatic Kokes tunneling to be sent bodily from one spacebound communication station to another. A simple exchange of messages between this frontier outpost and Larneg, 150 light years away, took two weeks. And the Powers-That-Be would not back down anyway, now that shipments had started.

A faint whine became audible, and the ship came into view. Murray watched it approach and settle silently two hundred yards away, bulky and alien. In 1200 years of loose association with man, since their first meeting on Alpha Centauri A III, the Redskins had shrewdly avoided telling just how their spacewarp ships worked. But Redskin shippers were more than happy to haul human goods, for a fee. Since modern colonization depended heavily on prefab structures that could not be carried economically by tunnel-ship, visiting Redskins had become a common sight on budding human colonies.

Still the only other spacefaring race man had met in expanding to his first thousand worlds, Redskins were a businesslike and ef-

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ficient people. Already this ship was opening its hatches and crewmen were swarming out. Minutes later came machinery hauling big flat crates, which would become houses in a matter of hours.

A couple of Redskins were heading this way with receipts for Murray to sign. He picked up a pen and started out to meet them. *Well,* he thought with a shrug, *here they come, ready or not.*

Midnnoa, the peninsula where the Chercqs lived, was a short hop away from Captown—hardly more than 200 miles across the Mediterranean Waters. Technically it was part of another continent, but the geologists were convinced that there had been but one continent in this hemisphere until geologically recent times. The four present continents and numerous islands still looked roughly like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, and none of the continents was separated from adjacent ones by more than 500 miles.

Leaving Captown at nine in the morning, Murray landed at the regional study group's headquarters in the lowlands near the tip of the peninsula a little after nine-thirty. He stepped out into the balmy subtropical morning and started toward the group of low buildings at the edge of the landing field. The strident songs of a thousand species of small animals filled the air. Somewhere in the nearby hills Murray heard a snatch of oddly modulated whistling, immediately answered by another some distance away. Two Chercqs talking—or at least linguistic studies so far suggested that the whistles were part of a complicated "language," which also included human speech-sounds and an assortment of clucks, chirps, and squeaks. That's how they got the name "Chercq".

Word traveled fast, and before Murray could reach the buildings, Bruce Crady came running out to meet him. The carrot-topped xenologist, young and bright and not yet jaded, bubbled with even more than his usual enthusiasm. Before Murray could break his news, Crady was herding him toward one of the buildings with the obscure explanation, "I've been anxious to have you meet somebody!"

It was just a few steps to Crady's office. While Murray took a seat, Crady poked his intercom and asked for somebody named Elmer. Within half a minute the door flew open, and in walked an adult male Chercq.

Murray blinked. He had never been this close to one before, and he was startled to see that, unlike the Redskins, they looked *more* humanoid at close range than from afar. From a distance they looked like mangy apes. This one, typically short, muscular, and hairy, but just eight feet away, might have passed for a somewhat more hirsute

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than average professional wrestler. And he was smoking a meerschaum pipe.

He took the pipe out of his mouth and said, "You wanted to talk to me, Bruce?" The Chercq's voice was deep and mellow, his accent almost perfectly colloquial.

Crady was grinning broadly. "Yes. Elmer, I'd like you to meet a friend of mine—Ike Murray. Ike, meet Elmer."

Elmer turned to Murray and stuck out a hand. "Hi, Ike!" An unmistakable smile showed through his shaggy beard.

Murray, dazed, shook Elmer's hand and returned the smile. "Hi, Elmer. Say, you certainly speak good Anglarneg!"

Elmer shrugged. "I manage. Bruce taught me. You're from offplanet too?"

Murray nodded, feeling an odd mental pain. He had said all along that people had something to learn from the Chercqs, but he had never really suspected just how much. But the new-school Expansionists—the "Manifest Destiny" party—didn't care about things like that. Soon Elmer's kind would go the way of the three other primitive races the expanding Grand Republic had found in its way, and there was very little Murray could do to prevent it.

Elmer turned back to Crady. Crady said, "That's all I wanted right now, Elmer. But I'd like it if you'd have lunch with Ike and me."

"Okay. Thanks, Bruce. I'll stop by around eleven-thirty."

As soon as the door closed after him, Murray blurted out, "How long has this been going on, Bruce? I knew they were intelligent, but—"

Crady laughed. "Yes, we've come a long way in a few months. First we thought the planet was tempting but uninhabited. Then we found a few thousand of them on this peninsula, uncannily humanoid but with no apparent culture. *Maybe,* we said, we've found an emerging intelligence. But gradually we realized they already had strikingly advanced behavior patterns, although bewilderingly variable, and a language. We started to get an inkling of their ways, and a smattering of the language, but it was slow, frustrating. We were beating our heads against a wall. I finally stumbled onto the easy way seven weeks ago. It seemed a long shot, but they pick up Anglarneg so easily it shames me."

Murray's cigarillo had gone out, but he didn't notice. *"They?* You mean Elmer's not the only one? And did you say seven *weeks?"*

"That's right. There's almost a dozen speaking Anglarneg pretty well already. Elmer's my favorite; we're kindred spirits. You'll like him too, once you get to know him. You couldn't tell much from the

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few words he said here. He doesn't like small talk."

Murray noticed his extinct cigarillo and tossed it away. "I don't like small talk either," he said.

Crady went on, "We're making more headway on their language, now that they can help us. And we're finally going to see how they're built. Elmer and his family have agreed to take physicals." He leaned forward on his desk and said earnestly, "Ike, for the first time in my career I'm really excited. How can we hang onto the 'budding savage' myth? We couldn't learn their language, but they learn ours easily. Some of them have taken our intelligence tests and scored five to twenty points above us. And they *do* have a culture, even if it's very alien to us. Mostly they live in isolated family groups, but recently we found two villages. Mostly they don't wear clothes, but if a cold spell comes, they put on coats. They have medicine, primitive-looking but effective—and without a lot of superstitious ritual. You heard Elmer ask if you were from off-planet. Well, that's not an idea we fed them; stars and planets are familiar concepts to them. All the trappings of what we call civilization are missing, but there's a high-level culture somehow maintaining itself without them. We've got to keep the Expansionists away from here—at least until we learn what makes the Chercqs tick!"

"I wish we could," Murray said slowly, "but the first shipload of development supplies arrived yesterday."

Crady's elation evaporated instantly. "What?"

"Our friend Ohara just couldn't wait. He forged my signature to a note that convinced the central bureaucrats it was time for the omni-conquering Larnegites to make their triumphant entrance. I just found out about it yesterday, and the message beat the ship only by a couple of hours. There's not much I can do now. You're replacing Ohara, by the way."

Crady seemed not to notice his promotion. "Any chance of keeping them off Midnnoa?"

Murray shook his head. "I suggested quite a while back that if and when colonization came, Midnnoa should be off limits. The reply came right back: 'It is contrary to Republic policy to bar colonists from an area because primitive natives are present. Colonists will be warned of their presence, but any who wish to settle there will receive the full cooperation and assistance of the Republic.' Translated, the Republic will help settle all the little petty squabbles that come up in the traditional way—by gradually exterminating the natives. And Midnnoa, by all other criteria, is a prime site. I almost wish it weren't such an attractive and hospitable place."

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Crady looked down at his desk. "They're so vulnerable! Not just their culture—the species itself is in danger. There'll be plenty of squabbles. The Chercqs are a lot more individualistic than people tend to tolerate. They can make adjustments—Elmer's picked up some of our social amenities because he sensed that humans felt uneasy without them and they took negligible effort. But when one of the technicians tried to get him to wear clothes, Elmer wouldn't hear of it. He said they'd be uncomfortable in this climate. The idea of telling somebody else what to wear was completely new to him, and not very pleasant. But humans have very definite ideas of How Things Should Be Done, even when it doesn't really matter. And they'll fight to make sure the other guy does it their way." He paused. "The Chercqs won't know what's happening to them. They have very little group feeling; the very concept that colonists collectively can be a threat to Chercqs collectively is something they don't have. Learning it won't be easy."

"I have one idea," Murray said. "Most humans don't have the right qualities to get along with Chercqs, but some do. Most of the people here do; they have to. I can't keep colonists off Midnnoa altogether, but I can impose 'safety restrictions' to keep out colonists who would be in unusual danger here. Let's do that—write screening tests to weed out people whose personalities would be friction-prone in Chercq country."

"That power's never been applied to a situation like this," Crady pointed out. "Will the home office stand for it?"

"I doubt it. But by the time the gripes filter up to the higher echelons, the first wave of colonization will be completed, and the Midnnoan group will have been handpicked by us."

Crady stood up. "All right. It's worth a try." He went to the window and stood looking down toward the beach. "Now that Ohara's got what he wanted here, where's he going?"

"Funny thing," Murray said. "I just got his request this morning. He wants to stay here as a colonist—indefinite unpaid leave, possibly retirement."

Crady spun away from the window, frowning. *"Here?"*

"Yes. On Midnnoa. He's applied for a piece of land, several thousand acres, almost on the Spine, up near the mainland. Our tests won't keep him out, either. He's worked with the Chercqs enough to know what reponses we're looking for."

Crady scratched his head. "Out of character," he said thoughtfully. "Ohara's not much over fifty and every inch a politician. Even if he really wanted to retire and farm, he could pick plenty of better land

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to do it on." He turned back to the window. "It's all out of character. Something's fishy."

II

The colonization techniques responsible for the rapid growth of the Republic, importing settlers fully assembled and everything else in kit form, took little time to remake a wilderness. The first colonizing freighter had come just six months ago, yet today, as Murray and Crady flew north over Midnnoa, they saw a rolling landscape conspicuously dotted by human habitations. It was the same in a dozen other areas on the planet. The only unique thing about Midnnoa was that among the domes and sheds here were still the homes of Chercqs, primitive and mostly invisible from the air. Murray wondered how long that would last.

Despite the screening program and the attempt to keep human land grants at least 500 yards from known Chercq dwellings, there had been incidents. Neither Murray nor Crady was surprised at that. Chercqs were unfamiliar with the idea of land ownership and tended to ignore boundaries. The human landowners just as naturally tended to object. Moreover, Chercq homes—mostly caves and huts—were inconspicuous. Sometimes previously unknown ones suddenly showed up in people's backyards. Murray and Crady had spent hundreds of hours visiting colonists and Chercqs to iron out difficulties. Understandings had been reached often enough, and the number of incidents had declined enough, to make them proud—less of themselves than of the colonists and Chercqs.

But there was still the time lag in communication between here and Larneg. Manifest Destiny propagandists were capitalizing on outdated statistics. News reports from Larneg showed that human-Chercq incidents had received a great deal of notice, both official and popular. In neither case were they very accurate. The fact that trouble existed was heavily emphasized; the fact that it was being dealt with successfully and bloodlessly was rarely mentioned. And there were ominous hints of a growing movement to officialize the new tendency to exterminate rather than to bypass natives who got in the Republic's way.

All Murray and Crady could do was to continue their efforts to smooth the course of affairs here—and be ready to fight the politicians on their own ground when the need arose.

As they headed toward the next visit of their temper-soothing

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campaign, the copter on autopilot, Crady pored over the freshest news releases. Finally he laid them down and said philosophically, "I think it's the very *humanness* of them that scares people."

"Hm?"

"People've learned to accept the Redskins, and even the other races we've squeezed off their own worlds didn't upset people the way the Chercqs are doing. I think it makes people uncomfortable to find a race that much like us. Aliens are supposed to *look* alien!"

Murray shrugged. "Could be. I don't know."

"If it is that, I can't predict where it'll lead. But I don't think I want that report I got back yesterday leaking out. Did I tell you about that?"

"I don't think so." The copter turned slightly inland. Ahead and to the right rose the Spine, the rugged, inhospitable ridge extending down the middle of Midnnoa from the mainland mountains. Murray started bracing himself for the ordeal coming up in a few minutes.

Crady was saying, " . . . another one of my long shots. We don't have the equipment here for detailed genetic analysis, so I sent some cell samples to a diagnostic lab on Larneg. I didn't mention that they were non-human; just asked for a report. They checked out normal. Ike, the Chercqs could interbreed with people!"

Murray couldn't think of anything to say. Certainly that was an unprecedented and exciting development, but Crady might well be right that it would be dangerous to release the report.

They were descending now, and the buzzer warned that autopilot control would end in thirty seconds. Crady prepared to take over; Murray resigned himself to the fact that the meeting was imminent.

The next complainant on the list was Andrew Ohara.

They landed on what seemed to be the only reasonably flat piece of land in the neighborhood. Walking across the grass toward the unassuming house, Murray realized more fully than ever how odd Ohara's moving out here was. Certainly the ex-Subcommissioner was not a farmer. Of some six thousand acres he had bought, little more than one was under cultivation—and rather inept cultivation, at that. Behind the house the ground rose sharply into the foothills of the Spine, not terribly high, but rough, craggy, and densely overgrown. Scenic, perhaps, as was the view toward the Mediterranean in the other direction, but surely it wasn't necessary to buy thousands of acres in a place few people would want just to enjoy the view. Yet Ohara had traded his handsome salary for a meager pension and probably dipped deep into his savings for this.

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Murray and Crady reached the house and knocked on the door. A small black-haired woman answered. Clova Ohara's smile as she invited them in was visibly less friendly than it had been when her husband worked for Murray. She had them sit down in the front room while she went to the back of the house and called out, "Andy, they're here!"

Moments later Ohara came in and sat down next to Clova on the couch facing Murray and Crady. Murray noted that living out here had done Ohara some good—he was looking healthier than when he had a desk job. His manner had changed more than Clova's. Gone was the obsequiousness he had shown toward Murray when he was constantly maneuvering for political advantage. Now he was just an indignant citizen.

"I'll come right to the point," he said. "I paid good money for title to this land. Now I find there are Chercqs living on it, making a real nuisance of themselves, ruining some of my crops. I don't care how you do it, but I want the varmints off my land."

Murray sighed. He couldn't quite believe that the former Subcommissioner of Native Affairs was serious. The whole thing was beginning to smell of deliberate trouble-making, but so far Murray could discern neither point nor pattern in it. He said simply, "We can't do that, Andy. It's not that simple."

Ohara snapped, "What do you mean, you can't do it? I paid for this land—without freeloading subhuman tenants!"

Clova interrupted her husband: "Please, Commissioner, I'm afraid of them. This can't go on."

Crady said, "I'm sure there's nothing to be afraid of, Mrs. Ohara. As for 'subhuman,' Mr. Ohara, that's highly questionable and you know it. You should have anticipated this possibility, of course. All the colonists were warned, and you should understand better than most what the problems are. That rough country behind your house still isn't thoroughly explored. You surely knew there might be Chercqs living there."

"So I should have known," Ohara grumbled. "It's too late for that now. It's not too late to get rid of them."

"I told you it's not that simple," Murray said. "If they were there first, there are ethical considerations that we insist on observing even if the law doesn't require it. We'll do everything we can to work out a compromise acceptable to both you and the Cherqs. You explain your side of it, and then lead us to the Chercqs so we can talk to them."

Ohara stood up. "I can see we're not going to get anywhere. Thanks

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for coming, gentlemen."

Clova tugged at his arm. "No, Andy. Don't give up. If that's all they can do, at least let them try it."

He looked in her direction but somehow not quite at her. There was something strange in his eyes. "No," he said firmly. "Just a waste of time. We're not going to get any help from them. Show them the door."

She looked at him for a long time, until she was convinced he was immovable. Then she obeyed.

Crady paused at the door and looked back at Ohara. "You passed the tests," he reminded quietly. "You showed that you know what it takes to get along with Chercqs. Now try to pretend you *have* what it takes. Use psychology."

As they turned to leave, they heard Ohara mutter, "I've got a gun. That's all the psychology I need."

A week later Murray reopened his office in Captown and sat down at the desk. The tour, he reflected, hadn't really been more tiring than the others, but he felt much more worn down at its end. It was that Ohara business. In none of the previous incidents had he heard a threat of physical violence. And Ohara wasn't just an ordinary settler. He was a rabid Expansionist of the new school, and he had a personal grudge against Murray. Everything he had done since his dismissal was hard to understand, but Murray was not ready to believe he had actually severed all his connections with the Party.

Piles of waiting paperwork took Murray's mind off that problem. But he had been at it for only twenty minutes when his secretary announced visitors from off-planet.

There were two of them, one conspicuously taller and one slightly shorter than average. Beyond that there was little to distinguish them. Both were middle-aged, carefully groomed, and dressed in the latest styles of the Larneg capital. The tall one stuck out a hand and smiled impersonally. "Commissioner Murray, I'm Inspector Mitchel from the Office of the Undersecretary of Extraterrestrial Life. This is Inspector Blaricom. May we sit down?"

"Certainly, gentlemen." Murray shook their hands and nodded with an appropriate air of subservience. Early in his career he had found that guise unpleasant to wear, but he had quickly learned that it was the most dependable first approach to these types. And when the game you were playing involved politics, you had to play by the opponent's rules as long as you could make them work for you.

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Mitchel stretched out in his chair and folded his hands on his stomach. "We've been sent to take a closer look at this testing program you've instituted, the one to keep settlers with certain types of personalities off that peninsula . . ." He smiled sheepishly and looked at Blaricom. "What's the name of that again?"

"Midnnoa," said Blaricom.

"Yes. Midnnoa, the one where the savages live. To put it bluntly, Commissioner, it sounds discriminatory. It also sounds like a distinctly questionable interpretation of your powers."

"I took the authorization," Murray said, "from the article that states—"

"We know where you took it," Mitchel interrupted. "That's what we're questioning. Previously that article has been invoked in cases where some physical trait would be a handicap under special environmental conditions. Using it to discriminate against *character* traits, to protect a primitive alien race, is quite unprecedented."

"I did what the situation seemed to demand, Inspector. I'm prepared to defend my decision."

"Good. You'll be expected to. We plan to tour Midnnoa during the next several days to see if we can find anything to justify your action—quite impartially, you understand. We want to help you preserve all the favor you deserve with the higher authorities."

A clever way of putting it, Murray thought. Blaricom said, "Actually, it isn't just the *justification* for the testing program that we're concerned about. Even its *efficacy* is open to doubt."

"Subcommissioner Crady and I have been quite pleased with the results."

"But as I understand it, the object was to prevent friction between colonists and natives. Yet I see from the news that there have been quite a number of incidents."

"But no violence!" Murray carefully emphasized every word. "Can any of the other inhabited worlds we've colonized claim that?" Blaricom squirmed slightly but didn't answer. "Lorania couldn't either, without the tests. The tests weren't infallible. They didn't pick perfect, already-adapted colonists. Nobody expected them to. They did pick people who were more capable of adjustment to local conditions than unscreened settlers would have been. Even the nonviolent incidents you mention have been declining at least as fast as we hoped. Remember, it takes you a month to come out here from Larneg. The information you have is far from current, and—" He was interrupted by chimes announcing an incoming nonlocal call. "Excuse me, gentlemen. I have to answer the phone."

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He touched a button. A lifelike bust of Crady appeared on the desk, facing Murray. Crady looked wildly excited, but not with the kind of excitement he had showed when he introduced Elmer. He said hurriedly, "Ike, have you heard about it?"

"Not now," said Murray. "I'm in a meeting."

"Right," said Crady, looking frustrated. "But call me back the instant you're out."

Murray did, but the delay didn't keep the inspectors from finding out what Crady wanted. His urgency whetted their curiosity, and when his message required Murray to make a sudden trip to Midnnoa, they invoked their special authority to invite themselves along.

Murray's worst fear when Crady called was that Ohara had killed a Chercq. The truth was much worse.

A Chercq had killed Ohara.

III

It was an open-and-shut case. For an hour Murray held out hope that there would be something to make it look better. Then Clova Ohara, badly upset and accompanied by a neighbor, was flown into Captown for hospitalization. She had been raving hysterically about the killing—using her husband's amateur radio gear at full blast, without license, and in violation of at least three dozen regulations. By the time Murray and the Inspectors from Larneg went to talk to her, she was barely coherent.

Any hope of convincing the inspectors that the incident was Ohara's fault vanished quickly. It was bad enough that Clova had had the chance to broadcast her emotion-charged version of the incident to the whole planet—and the interstellar net. But what sewed things up was that she had been present at the early-morning argument between Ohara and the Chercq and had been carrying an ultraminiature camera. When she realized what was happening, she had taken a couple of pictures. The first was too late to show what had led up to the killing, but the second clearly showed the Chercq shooting Ohara in the chest with Ohara's gun.

Murray's own suspicion was that the Chercq had grabbed the gun when he realized it was a weapon and Ohara was threatening him. Having it in hand but not knowing how it worked, he might well have fired it by accident.

But there was no evidence of that, and the neighbor could only

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testify that several people had seen the Chercq in headlong flight afterward, apparently going north along the Spine.

The only piece of real evidence at hand showed beyond dispute that a Chercq, for whatever reason, had violently killed a human on his "own" land.

Before the day was out, a Patrol unit had started into the upper Midnnoan wilderness on the trail of the fleeing Chercq. Nobody was sure what would be done with him once he was caught, but that could be decided afterward.

Meanwhile Inspectors Mitchel and Blaricom took off on their Midnnoan tour. They must have been exceedingly thorough, Murray thought, for they were back in his office within two days.

"I suppose," said Mitchel, stretched out in the same chair as before, "you had some suspicion that there was—ah—more to our mission than what we've already told you?"

Murray waited, neither speaking nor nodding. Mitchel went on, "That suspicion would be correct. We have satisfied ourselves that your testing program was not justified in either principle or practice, and we will recommend that action be taken to correct the mistake. Beyond that, no doubt you are aware, Commissioner, that the recent trend in colonization has reversed the old practice of staying off desirable worlds because they happen to have primitive natives."

"Very," Murray nodded.

Mitchel took out an ornate cigarette holder, fitted a cigarette into it, and lit up. "The problem hasn't arisen often—three times previously, I believe. It is unfortunate, perhaps, but a fact of life, that in each case the native culture was unable to withstand the advent of the superior race.

"In each case the destruction of the native culture was drawn out over a period of several years, with a good deal of bloodshed on both sides. Yet in each case the end result was the same. You are probably aware that there is a growing faction in the Republic advocating the elimination of this painful period of conflict and gradual destruction. Ultimately it would be better for everybody to substitute a quick, clean period of humanely eliminating such primitive cultures early in the colonization process."

Murray said quietly, "Murder is never humane."

Mitchel glared at him. "I'm sorry you feel that way, Commissioner, but the matter is out of your hands. We were asked to examine the suitability of Midnnoa as a test case for this policy. We have authority to call in consulting experts, but that won't be necessary.

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We've already decided to recommend the action."

Murray had anticipated this, but now that it was really happening, he couldn't decide what to say. Before he said anything, Blaricom put in his words for the day. "Yes. And may I recommend to *you,* Commissioner, that you watch your tongue. Your superiors have been watching you, not altogether approvingly. You give the impression of trying deliberately to obstruct the Republic's progress."

"Not at all. I just don't think it's really necessary for us to wipe out everybody else we meet. There are a great many habitable planets, even in the tiny part of the Galaxy that people have reached so far. Only a small fraction of them have natives. I see no reason why the few we do find can't be left to develop on their own. That policy was followed for well over two centuries of very successful growth. Your Founder Wilmsen insisted on it, remember?" Murray changed the subject. "May I ask just how much the Ohara incident had to do with your decision?"

Mitchel smiled, not very pleasantly. "Commissioner, we're both adults and we've both been in this business long enough to know how it works. I sense that you're about to attack me with arguments about how the murder was the act of an individual Chercq and we mustn't transfer blame to the others." (He was wrong: Murray hadn't even considered wasting that kind of argument on him.) "Please spare me. Not that I would dispute you, but the public won't think that way. We're about to implement a major change in Republic policy, and we can expect some vocal opposition from what I might term a 'do-gooder' element. We'll need arguments of our own, preferably more emotional than rational, to unite public opinion behind us. From that standpoint, this murder came at a rather convenient moment."

Murray said nothing. He could see now that he had an excellent chance of eventually losing his job over this affair. But he would have to keep it as long as possible to be in a position to fight this decree by methods that *might* work.

The same chimes that had interrupted their first meeting sounded again. This time Murray didn't take the call at all, but just activated a recorder which would hold a message for reply.

But again the call required a sudden trip to Middnoa, and again the inspectors went along.

The message was from Sergeant Kiman of the Patrol unit there. A group searching the murder site and its surroundings had found something they thought both Murray and Crady should see—but they wouldn't say what it was.

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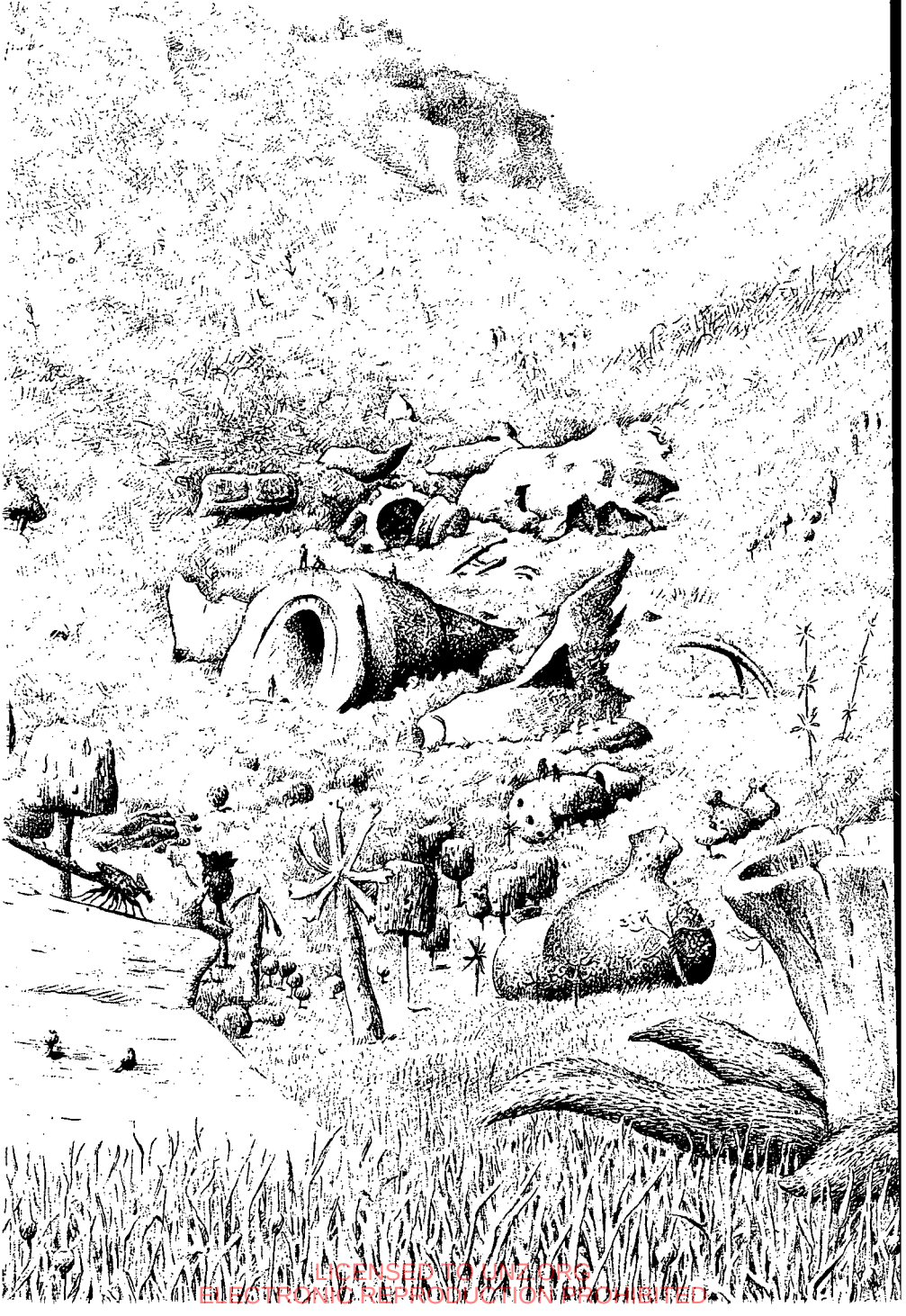

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The hills behind Ohara's house began abruptly, less than fifty yards back, with a barricade of big rock outcroppings overgrown with purplish vines. Kiman led his caravan single-file into a narrow crevice among the rocks—Murray, Crady, Mitchel, Blaricom, and another Patrolman. The path sloped upward and emerged after twenty feet into the deep shade of subtropic jungle. Intertwined trees formed an opaque canopy that hid the sky. Dense undergrowth sheltered screaming millions of "binsects," native dodecapods supplied in a wide range of sinister-looking shapes and sizes up to a foot long.

The narrow path that the Patrol had hacked through the growth led upward, sometimes almost vertically. Big rocks jutted from the hillside at irregular but frequent intervals. The trail wound past them, with occasional downs and almost perpetual ups, until it came to a small stream tumbling down the hillside. From there it followed the stream bed, except where it had to detour around waterfalls that sometimes covered sixty feet in a single plunge. Often a shadowy, weasel-like form would dart suddenly into the bushes—a vikarl, the largest mammaloid other than the Chercqs that had yet been found on the planet.

More than an hour but less than a mile after they started, they emerged into sunlight on the grassy rim of a deep ravine. This side was steep; the other was both steeper and higher. Both sides and bottom were choked with vegetation.

Kiman pointed to something in the bottom of the ravine and announced, "There it is." Murray followed his finger and found it. When he shook his head and looked again, it was still there. "We haven't had time to get all the growth cut away from it yet," Kiman said, "but I don't think there's much doubt about what it is."

There wasn't. Even the metal that had been exposed was tarnished and twisted, but enough essentials remained to shout its identity loud and clear.

The thing in the ravine was a ship—human-built and incredibly old.

IV

Murray's stateroom aboard the *President Wilmsen* was small, drab, and uncomfortable. And windowless. Not that there was anything to see outside during the long days and weeks beyond the speed of light, unless another tunnel-ship happened to be nearby. But Murray liked to look at the stars during the first and last days

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of an interstellar trip. Under ideal conditions he found this kind of travel maddeningly oppressive. On *this* trip, he felt like a prisoner, although officially, of course, he was nothing of the kind.

The inspectors had recognized at once that human artifacts would throw an entirely new light on the Midnnoan situation, and they summoned Murray as Planetary Commissioner to discuss the whole matter with higher officials. They had sent for the experts they had mentioned, and waited around for thirteen days to meet them personally—and meanwhile to see that nobody disturbed the shipwreck. Only then would they leave for home. Now Murray would be kept away from his work for at least two months. He felt sure that the trip would be fruitless. Loranian administration was in capable hands—Crady's—but that just kept Crady away from his own work. No matter how he looked at it, Murray couldn't see that anybody except the Expansionists would profit from the trip.

At times like this, two weeks out in a blank-walled cubicle, he sometimes caught himself thinking enviously of the Redskins' warpships. With tunnel-ships, most of the time on any trip was spent in acceleration and deceleration. The warpships cut that out; as soon as they cleared planet, they could somehow jump right to cruising speed. They made the Lorania-Larneg run in a week. But the Redskins claimed that it was better for man to find that trick for himself than to have it handed to him on a silver platter. After a little reflection, Murray usually wound up agreeing with them.

And since no humans had yet found the trick, he now had plenty of time for reflection. Much of it focused on the Chercqs and the shipwreck.

Was it actually possible that the Chercqs were descendants of human shipwreck survivors? For months, nobody had even suggested the possibility. The Chercqs looked more humanoid than other aliens, but they also looked different enough that they *might* be another species.

Mutants? No, Crady had said that they could pass for genetically normal human beings.

And now Murray saw that the apparent difference didn't require mutation for its explanation. Chercqs tended to be shorter, stockier, and hairier than people of the Republic, but Murray had seen *individual* men shorter, stockier, and hairier than the Chercq norm. There was no hereditary male baldness among Chercqs, but there were human families in which it had not appeared for many generations.

Shipwreck survivors would represent a very small genetic pool,

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a tiny selection from the vast human population. Their descendants would show a much higher incidence than the normal population of certain traits present in that pool. Other traits fairly common in humanity at large would be missing altogether. The shipwreck descendants would have a different set of norms, a different *distribution* of traits, from the people of the Republic, giving the impression of a different race—perhaps, if the initial gene pool were small enough, even a different, though similar, species. Add to that the effects of environment—the typical Chercq physique was probably not unrelated to the slightly high Loranian gravity—and it became hard to insist that the Chercqs could not be what they seemed.

That still left big unanswered questions, of course. If that ship was really human-built, when and how did it get there? Until a few weeks ago Murray and everybody else had taken it for granted that Lorania was an extreme frontier of human exploration. But enough ships had roamed the stars in recent centuries, including private starboaters, that a few might have disappeared without his knowledge. Maybe some poor daredevil long ago had ventured out far beyond civilization with some friends, and his failure to return had just been shrugged off.

The nagging question of the discovery's impact was trickier than it looked. Murray could not be sure that a human origin would end the threat to the Chercqs. He did know that the Constitution said the laws of the Republic applied to all resident members of the species, except for certain privileges of citizenship.

He also knew that the Expansionists had already resolved to see the Chercqs exterminated—and that the legal minds among them were as adept as any at interpreting the law to fit their own needs.

Larneg, now the nucleus of the largest existing human political unit and the most avid seeker of new Earthlike worlds, had started as the first spectacular triumph of terraforming.

Fewer than 1100 years ago it had all been barren. Now blue sky sprawled overhead; on the surface, green leaves and wildly colored flowers glistened in the white light of two blazing suns.

Moving strips carried Murray swiftly from the ship to the edge of the landing field. From there, sandy paths led across the broad garden surrounding the spaceport. An underground shuttle whisked him in minutes to the forest of towers that was the heart of the Capital. More moving strips carried him quickly and easily to his hotel.

He checked in, examined the room that had been reserved for him,

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and inspected his luggage. Then a lazy fall down one elevator shaft, a short walk across the street, and a drift up another elevator brought him onto the battlefield.

He was face to face with a genuine Larneg bureaucrat—the first of many.

Three days later he looked wearily up at the clock on a waiting room wall. It was the dozenth time he had looked at that clock, and the waiting room was the eighth or ninth he had been in. He had expected a runaround, but it was beginning to seem that the sole point of bringing him to Larneg had been to keep him from doing anything useful.

He must be near the end of the line now, though. This waiting room belonged to Bernard Mauricio, *the* Secretary of Extraterrestrial Life. He could go no higher. If anything was going to be settled, it would have to be here.

Twenty-five minutes later a poker-faced receptionist awakened him and told him he could go in. He settled his weight onto a foot that was still asleep and hobbled across the thick carpet. By the time he reached the big door, both feet were back to normal. The door slid silently open, and he walked through it without stopping.

Mauricio crouched in a deep leather-covered chair behind a huge, polished ebony desk. With small eyes set in a pudgy face under thick brow ridges, he glared at Murray over the top of a thick dossier. "Sit down," he said gruffly, nodding slightly toward a simple plastic chair on the near side of the desk. Murray sat and waited while Mauricio continued to thumb through the sheets in the file folder, occasionally making rumblings in his throat. Finally he laid the folder flat on the otherwise bare desk and looked at Murray. "Wouldn't it be easier for you, as well as us, if you'd quit trying to rock the boat?"

Murray said, "I'm not sure I know what you mean."

Mauricio laughed, a single staccato blast. "Come now, Commissioner. You were sent to that planet with two jobs to do. First, to supervise the survey expeditions while they looked to see if it was something we wanted. Second, if they found that it was, to supervise the establishment of colonies. Now, you know and I know—" he flipped through the dossier as if to refresh his memory of what it was they both knew— "that the survey teams found several eminently desirable colony sites. Yet because of a few thousand primitive natives, you've tried repeatedly to block the normal colonization process. When it came despite your efforts, you complicated it with

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a highly unorthodox and totally unprecedented set of restrictions."

Murray said nothing. Mauricio went on. "I have in hand reports which two inspectors from a lower office in this branch sent back from Lorania a few weeks ago, assuring me that those restrictions were unnecessary, unjustified, and ineffective. I am prepared to accept those reports. They also advised the humane extermination of the primitives in question, and I am prepared to accept that recommendation. In the light of all this, Commissioner, your fitness for your job is seriously questioned."

Murray was a little startled. Mauricio wasn't beating around the bush as much as the underlings had, and he was suddenly posing a threat that Murray hadn't expected to face this soon. The issue he had thought was the immediate reason for his being called here hadn't been mentioned. "Don't you have another report from your Inspectors there? Something that might make us change all our attitudes toward the Chercq problem?"

Mauricio snorted. "I guess you're talking about the alleged shipwreck. My first reaction is simply still more doubt about your competence. I don't know what you could hope to gain by an extravagant fabrication like that—"

"*What?* Are you saying you think it's a hoax?"

"I'm not saying it *is*. I'm saying that's what it *looks* like. Surely you'll grant that the notion of a very old human ship way out there is farfetched. And the implication that those beasts are descended from its passengers . . ." His voice trailed off, and he shook his head. "Not easy to swallow, Commissioner. It's easier to believe you developed some wild delusion that we would fall for the story and it would change our minds about the aborigines."

"Secretary Mauricio," Murray said coldly, "please accept my assurance that I would have had no idea what official reaction to such a story would be. But one thing it isn't is a hoax. I—"

Mauricio motioned him to silence. "Save your explanations. You're being given the fullest benefit of the doubt. You know the inspectors have called in a number of specialists to check this thing thoroughly, on the off-chance it might be authentic. Action on the Loranian natives—and yourself—is being withheld until I have their report. You are to stay in the Capital until I reach a final decision."

"I see."

"You'll be called when I'm ready. That could be an hour from now or a month from now. Good day."

Murray went to the elevators, dropped to the ground floor and stepped outside onto wet pavement. He crossed the street in a cold

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drizzle that pretty well matched his mood.

As soon as he stepped into the hotel lobby, he noticed the familiar face grinning at him from behind a newspaper on a couch near the elevators. "Bruce Crady!" he gasped. "What are you doing here?"

V

Murray locked his room and rechecked it for bugs before he would let Crady say more than hello. Anything that caused Crady to show up on Larneg at this time must be pretty important.

Finally he settled back in a chair facing Crady. "Now, where do we start? According to my calculations, if you came the usual way, you must have left Lorania just a couple of days after I did. Who's minding the store?"

"Elmer," Crady said.

"Elmer?"

"Yes. Not officially, of course. Officially, Prentis is in charge, but he's with us, and he yielded to popular demand to let Elmer make most of the actual decisions. Incidentally, I was there for almost three weeks after you left. I hitched a ride on a Redskin freighter."

Murray was beginning to feel dizzy. "Popular demand to let Elmer run things? Fill me in."

"Most of us agreed that, of the people left on the planet while we were gone, Elmer was the best man for the job. He knows the planet, and especially Midnnoa, better than any of the colonists. He's had more experience with us than any of the other Chercqs. And he's smart and reliable. In addition to which the colonists thought it might be a good propaganda point at some strategic time to be able to point out that they voluntarily put a Chercq in charge of things."

"Bruce," Murray said slowly, "have I been missing a big point?"

"Yes, but it's not your fault. This crisis just brought it out in the open. Word has spread, and the colonists are up in arms about what the Expansionists want to do to the Chercqs, whether they're human or not. Ike, I think we have the beginnings of a new culture on Midnnoa. We knew the Chercqs were absorbing useful items of Republic culture almost as fast as they were exposed. It's worked both ways. The colonists have been adopting Chercqish attitudes and ways of doing things. I guess it's not really too surprising; the screening tests tended to favor people with important similarities to Chercqs to begin with. Anyway, most of them now like, or at least respect, their neighbors. Quite a few insist the Chercqs they know

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are the best neighbors they've ever had. If an exterminating party goes in there, they'll have civil war on their hands."

Murray smiled wryly. "That's refreshing," he said, "but I can picture the colonists' being wiped out along with the Chercqs. You said something about 'whether they're human or not.' Is there any word on that?"

"Yes. They are. How much do you remember about twenty-first century history?"

"Not terribly much. Probably a good bit would come back if you kicked my memory."

"Okay, brace yourself. You may remember there was a false start before interstellar expansion from Sol really got going. A pair of sub-c ships called the *Mayflower* and the *Columbus* set out together for Alpha Centauri. The *Mayflower* made it. The *Columbus* hit the wake of a Redskin warpship bound for Alpha Persei and disappeared.

"At that time our ancestors didn't even know the Redskins existed, and the incident scared them silly. They stopped trying for the stars for about a third of a century. Things didn't get going again until Kokes stumbled onto c-barrier tunneling and people met the Redskins. They found out in a general way what happened to the *Columbus,* but they still didn't know where it wound up. Well, it wound up on Midnnoa."

Murray nodded. So the wreck on Midnnoa was the *Columbus*! The Chercqs, then, were not just *any* shipwreck survivor descendants. They were one of the two oldest human colonies outside the Solar System—and still one of the most remote.

Crady took a folding viewer and a film can out of an inner pocket. "They had time to find the planet and even to look for a good spot to land," he said. "Then something went wrong at the last minute and they cracked up in that ravine. Of the whole crew, only three survived, all in the sick bay near the middle of the ship: one man, a doctor; and two women—a biotechnician assisting the doctor and a chemist under treatment for some mild ailment called a 'cold.' The women were identical twins. I was surprised at that, but I guess there were other considerations they thought were more important in making up those first crews. Probably didn't have too many qualified volunteers available in those days, and the colonizing party was expected to be a lot bigger.

"Anyway, that can explain a lot about how the Chercqs fooled us into thinking they were a different race. There were only two sets of chromosomes to start with. Those crews had to meet rigorous standards, both personally and genetically, so there wasn't a lot of

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trouble with non-survival recessives. Instead a lot of desirable genes kept coming together. It's going to be a blow to some folks' egos, I guess, but the Chercqs aren't just human. They're a superior strain, the result of a semi-accidental eugenics experiment." He handed the viewer and film to Murray. "I copied some of the records from the ship. I thought you might like to see them."

Murray read the ancient documents with acute interest. The English taught in schools was not quite the actual speech of twenty-first century America, but it was close enough to read without great difficulty. The handwritten words of the crew told how the three injured survivors had found their way to the clement lowlands and established a new and viable way of life. That way of life strongly reflected the personalities of its three founders, as well as their circumstances.

Its "primitiveness" stemmed from several causes. Its founders had only a few of the special skills they would have needed to build a culture like that at home. The ones they had were largely devoted to learning to cope with the few menaces that existed on Midnnoa. But on the whole life was so easy there, working with the environment instead of against it, that most of the trappings of civilization were not really necessary. The desire to do without them, and to spread out, seemed to Murray a very understandable reaction to being cooped up for years in a cramped, primitive starship. But important attitudes and bits of knowledge had been kept alive all these centuries by a diligent program of *intrafamily* training. By the time Murray finished reading, the "three survivors" had become three individuals, each of whom he personally admired.

"We should have suspected this long ago," Crady said, "but we were just too sure we were on a new frontier. We'd all heard of the *Columbus*, and we should have realized that it had to go somewhere—very likely in this general region of space. But it never occurred to us that we might actually find it. There was lots of evidence that should have made us wonder. The appearance of the Chercqs, their numbers, their distribution, that chromosome analysis, our failure to find related species, living or fossil. And then there's the really big one, which we've been trying to rationalize away for the last six months."

"What's that?"

"Their language. Like ours, it's evolved from English, but along different lines. The similarities are numerous and striking. But nobody would stick his neck out far enough to suggest the obvious reason. The whistles are a separate sublanguage for long-distance

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communication, since most families don't live very close together. Similar things were in use in spots on Earth long before space travel. The miscellaneous 'funny' sounds seem to go right back to baby talk and the founders' sense of humor." Crady chuckled. "You know we got the name 'Midnnoa' from them. Do you know where they got it?"

"No."

"A fast pronunciation of the English words 'middle of nowhere,' which is where that crew must have thought they were after they hit that warp. Incidentally, Ohara knew at least part of this."

"Oh?"

"Sure. The Patrol went through some of his papers. When he was Subcommissioner, he found that ship while he was on a mission in his private copter. He also figured that finding out the Chercqs had a human origin would change things. He wasn't sure *how,* but his fear was that it would prevent colonization. That's why he sent his note to rush colonization through. He was so fanatically eager to see the Republic not miss a single planet that when you fired him, he bought that land to keep anybody else from finding the ship. That's why he didn't want us to go back and talk to the Chercqs. He was afraid we'd see it."

Murray scowled. "Then why did he even call us in to talk about his Chercq troubles?"

"To shut his wife up. She'd been nagging him. He hadn't told her about the shipwreck."

"Hm. Did they ever catch the Chercq who killed him?"

"No. They gave up the search. Technically there's still a reward out for him, but I don't think anybody'll ever collect. How are you doing here?"

Murray told him, rather glumly, and asked, "Do you have any idea when Mauricio will get that report?"

"It's probably on his desk now. They were about ready to send it when I left. Do you have your appeal all ready?"

"More or less." Murray laughed. "I'm not sure an 'appeal' is what you'd call it, though. High-sounding oratory is lovely for getting elected, but it's a waste of time on the inside. We have a dandy case on ethical grounds alone, but ethics bounce right off this character. So I plan to do what any decent red-blooded boy would do."

"Which is?"

"Hit him below the belt. It won't sound as nice in the history books, but it just may save the Chercqs. All I plan to do is speak his own language to him." He paused and added gloomily, "I'm doubtful about even that."

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He saw with surprise that Crady was grinning. The Subcommissioner said cryptically, "Don't get your hopes down yet. I brought along another surprise for you—and Mauricio."

VI

Mauricio's call came the following morning, instructing Murray to report to his office immediately after lunch. Without consulting Mauricio, Murray took Crady along.

They had a little trouble getting past Mauricio's receptionist, but Murray finally convinced her that the Subcommissioner of Native Affairs was entitled to hear what the Secretary of Extraterrestrial Life had to say. Murray went into the inner office first. He found Mauricio looking more cheerful than he had yesterday, with a touch of smugness; his expression reminded Murray of Ohara's on the day he was fired. The smugness faded temporarily when Crady followed Murray into the room. But after a moment of explanation, the Secretary shrugged off the uninvited guest's presence.

Mauricio folded his hands on the desk and looked up at Murray without inviting him to sit down. "I owe you an apology, Commissioner," he said with a faint smile. "I have the word of competent authorities that your shipwreck is authentic and your Chercqs are indeed of human descent."

Murray nodded and waited.

"I have the impression," Mauricio droned on, "that you had hoped this would cause a reversal of our previous decisions. Now that my apology is disposed of, I must regretfully—" he smiled broadly and stiffly—"disappoint you."

Murray tightened inside. Half of him started going over what he planned to say while the other half listened intently. "My authorities tell me," said the Secretary, "that the Chercqs are not merely *descended* from humans; they *are* humans. No evolution worth mentioning has occurred. Biologically, they're the same species as you and I."

His speech quickened. "You will recall that all human beings living on Republic territory are subject to Republic laws. Those laws include standards for decency in clothing, health regulations, public schooling laws, tax laws, land ownership laws, and hundreds of others.

"Lorania is Republic territory. Chercqs are human beings. *They are, therefore, subject to all these laws.* Commissioner, the gross law-

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lessness of your Chercqs is a menace to the law and order of the Republic! There is not one of them who is not guilty of a dozen crimes or more. They are a degenerate, outlaw group. Our best interests still demand that they be hunted down and eliminated as a menace to our law-abiding citizens. I see no essential change in our policies as a result of thse discoveries."

Murray knew what he was going to say, but now that it was time to say it, he lacked confidence. He wasn't going to attack the blatant irrationality of Mauricio's ultra-literal interpretation of the law; in fact, he would carry it a step or two further. His arguments seemed sound, but they lacked teeth.

"I won't dispute your basic point," he began quietly. "The Constitution does provide that humans on Republic soil are subject to our laws. And it's true that every Chercq has failed to comply with many of them." Out of the corner of his eye he saw Crady slip out of the room. That annoyed and puzzled him. Was Crady deserting him because of a few opening remarks?

He forced his mind back to the task at hand. "But the law also provides a specific punishment for every infraction! And an individual trial for each violator, for each violation. If you want to enforce the law, you'll have to do it accurately. Individual charges will have to be prepared, and an individual trial must be arranged and carried through, for every case."

Mauricio was staring at him, red-faced. Murray drove on: "At last count, there were eight thousand, five hundred and sixty-two known Chercqs. Each, as you say, is guilty of several violations. From sheer numbers, an attempt to do this job right would swamp many courts for many months. But it's not even that simple. Many Chercqs don't speak Anglarneg. None of our judicial people speaks Chercq. The entire Chercq culture is highly individualistic. Most Chercqs are very reasonable if you approach them in what they can recognize as a reasonable way, and stubbornly unccoperative if you don't. Very few Cherqs are going to cooperate with being dragged into a court or anything that you do after you get them there."

"Then we get them for contempt, too," Mauricio muttered tightly.

"Come now, Secretary Mauricio! Contempt carries a fine or a jail sentence. Chercqs don't use money, and we don't have jail space for eight thousand contempt cases." Murray noticed the sounds of a growing commotion in the outer office and wondered idly what was going on. He leaned forward on the edge of Mauricio's desk and said confidentially, "This is election year, Mr. Mauricio. Do you think the courts will forgive your bringing a mess like this down on them,

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just to push your prejudices through on a remote colony?"

Mauricio stared hatefully at Murray, his lower lip trembling. Finally he said, "Of course, that scheme is impractical. And if I proceed with the other plan?"

"Then *you* become guilty of more serious crimes than any Chercq. As human beings, Chercqs are guaranteed the Republic's protection against violent assault." The noise in the outer office was getting louder.

Mauricio said desperately, "I am the highest authority in this branch of the government. Lorania is a small, remote outpost. The structure of the government is complicated. The extermination might be carried out quietly and kept from the attention of anyone in a position to prosecute. Soon it would be forgotten even by the few people who knew of it. The risk looks slight to me, Commissioner. Exactly how do you propose to prevent my taking it?"

Murray broke into a sweat. This was the point at which he lacked something solid. He started trying to formulate a statement about civil war that wouldn't sound ridiculous.

And at that moment the door to the outer office burst open, and a horde of shouting people swarmed into the room.

Mauricio rose to his feet. "What the devil's going on here?" he bellowed.

Before they stopped coming there must have been sixty or seventy frontiersmen in the inner office, and more extended out at least to the hallway. Some were barefoot; most were clad in ways highly unorthodox by Larneg standards; many were bearded. Practically all looked intelligent and alarmingly determined. Some were armed with signs bearing slogans like "Save the Chercqs" and "Leave Our Neighbors Alone—Or Else!"; a few had more potent weapons.

Crady, wearing a broad grin, hurried to the front of the crowd through an aisle cleared for him. He walked up to Mauricio. "Mr. Secretary," he announced with an exaggerated bow, "allow me to introduce the Midnnoan delegation." He turned to Murray. "This is the surprise I mentioned, Ike. A couple of hundred colonists came with me on that freighter to show the Secretary their support." A loud, ominous cheer went up from the colonists.

Crady turned back to Mauricio. "Election year, isn't it, sir? These folks—and more—are prepared to campaign. If any of the threats against the Chercqs is carried out, they can and will raise an enormous public stink. Since it will be coming from the people who live among the ones you want to wipe out, I think it will have a good bit

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of emotional appeal. To put it bluntly, sir, you won't have a chance. You'll be finished."

Murray smiled to himself. So Crady had brought the teeth he needed! He said to Mauricio, "Looks like you're in a bit of a spot, doesn't it? Let's see, you can't enforce the law among the Chercqs in a fully legal way or the courts will do you in politically. If you exterminate the Chercqs the way you want to, their colonist neighbors will take it right to the public, thereby doing you in politically." The alternative he didn't mention—but which he suddenly realized Mauricio would see at once—was that if Mauricio dropped his stand on the Chercqs, his party would drop him. Thereby doing him in politically.

Sweat ran down Mauricio's forehead. For over a minute he was silent. Murray waited tensely. Certainly they had the Secretary forced into a corner. They had him blocked so thoroughly, in fact, that it was hard to tell what kind of hole he would dig to escape.

Finally Mauricio spoke in a very low voice. "Murray, you're a troublemaker. The Republic doesn't need you any more. These people here, too—all troublemakers. That planet has caused nothing but trouble. It has nothing extraordinary to offer the Republic. I don't think the Republic needs it."

A roar started among the colonists, and he held up his hand for silence. "Wait. What I'm saying is that I'm withdrawing Republic protection and trade. You're being thrown out! Loyal citizens who so desire will be lifted off, and their losses will be reimbursed. The rest of you will be left on your own in the wilderness, disenfranchised, boycotted, and shunned by the Republic while we go on to better things. You'll get no help of any kind from us. Eventually your miserable world can be phased right out of our records.

"The action is highly unusual, and I'm willing to take it only because the circumstances are unique and should not arise again. Other worlds are still plentiful, and I believe the Republic will eventually get yours anyway, after you people have found that you can't make it on your own." His voice was tired as he finished, "The Party will accept this as a temporary measure, justified in a single rare instance without sacrificing the principle we're trying to establish. And then they'll forget, until your world is rediscovered—after I'm dead and gone. As for the public, I'm sure that among all the data we've been sent, we can find some pretext for overruling the decision to colonize Lorania. Now go, *outcasts!*" His hands were trembling, but his decision was made; and he should be able to get through the election on it—if the Midnnoans would keep quiet.

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Right now they were very quiet, uncertain how to react. Mauricio repeated in a choked voice, "Go!"

Murray turned to face them. With a reassuring smile and confident bearing he started toward the door. They followed.

In the garden strip around the spaceport, worried colonists clustered around Murray and Crady. One of them said, "I never heard of such a thing! Is it good or bad?"

Murray laughed. "Very good, I think—as good as we can make it. I never heard of a colony being expelled either, but the situation *is* unique, and Mauricio's main concern is his own political survival. He had to think of something slippery. For us it's a chance. And people who don't want to live on an outcast world can leave at Republic expense."

"How do we decide?" another colonist asked.

"If you got into Midnnoa, you're probably more the outcast type," Crady said. "It depends on whether you prefer security or opportunity. The Republic will give more security, but it's overgrown, stale, and sick. The fact that legalized genocide was even considered is a symptom of its sickness. We're better off without the Republic.

"But Lorania, and especially Midnnoa, is something new and fresh. The world itself is a fine place to live. The Chercqs are a superior, vigorous, and unfettered lot because they chose their ancestors wisely. Midnnoan colonists are also superior because of screening. I think this bunch can build quite a world on its own. I know one thing: I want to be there to watch, and help."

Murray nodded. "So do I." It had never occurred to him before that independence was what he had been fighting for. The possibility of winning would have seemed too remote even to think about. But he realized now that it had been in the back of his mind all along.

Looking at the faces around him, he saw the spirit starting to spread. He grinned proudly. "We've been kicked out of the nest. Let Mauricio come out there in a hundred years and see who can't fly!"

The big Redskin ship out on the field had opened its hatches, and the train of outcasts started streaming aboard. Ten minutes later the hatches slid silently shut, cutting off probably the last bright rays of Capella Murray would ever see.

He was going home. ●

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LETTERS

Dear Editor:

After reading a few issues of your incredible magazine, I felt I should write you another letter. I love *IAsfm* and what it's doing for the world of science fiction. Who knows? Maybe this is where I'll get my first story published.

I was looking through the Dec. 21 issue of your magazine and noticed Robert Silverberg had a story inside. Much to my delight it turned out to be a Majipoor story. The next day I spied the Jan. 18 issue of *IAsfm* on the shelf of a local bookstore and 'Lo and behold!' there was another Silverberg story inside, and it was a Majipoor story yet!

Now what I'm getting at is: Are you planning to regularly publish Majipoor stories? And, if so, are they (including the two already published) included in the upcoming *Majipoor Chronicles*? And just out of curiosity, is the Majipoor story in F&SF (Dec.) included in the Majipoor Chronicles?

O.K., I'm finished with the questions for now. I'll move on to my comments about the features in your mag. First, I'll say that "Among the Dream Speakers" and "Aquila" were both excellent stories. I also enjoyed "Halfway" by Sharon Farber. "Time Warp Trauma" (in the Dec. ish) was another good one. I must say I find Mr. Searles's book reviews very helpful and enjoyable, and love the Letters section. I especially liked Mr. Davidson's reply to Mr. Morgenstern. (But having Harlan Ellison beat him up!?)

Steve Antczak
6527 N.W. 2nd St.
Margate, FL 33063

Well, you know, we can't guarantee publishing Majipoor stories regularly. Bob Silverberg has to write them regularly first, and then he has to send them to us regularly. Naturally, we'll do our best to persuade him to do so—and if he does, then we'll do our part, never fear. And yes, all the Majipoor stories we've published, as well as those in F&SF *and* Omni, *appear in the book, now available from Arbor House.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Editor:

I recently had the opportunity to

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hear Dr. Asimov speak at the University of Rochester's Science Fiction Convention. It was a great pleasure not only to *hear* his voice, but to *see* it interpreted for the deaf as well. Rochester has a large deaf community, and perhaps we are used to having many of our public gatherings interpreted. Still, not enough are interpreted on a regular basis, and I was glad to see that someone had had the foresight and thoughtfulness to arrange for an interpreter.

Andrea L. Murphy

I feared at the outset that the presence of an interpreter to one side of me might throw me off, but I was quite wrong. The pleasure of knowing I was reaching people I might otherwise not reach far outweighed the distraction of motion to one side.
—Isaac Asimov

Dear Avram Davidson:

What an honor to be lambasted on the pages of Issac Assimov's magazine (Letters, December 1981) by a successful (if prolix) author, and threatened with the august personage (as in actual body) of Mr. Harlan Ellison himself!

Regarding my letter printed in the June 1981 issue, of which you complain, I never intended to criticize you as a writer, nor did I state my personal opinion of your story "Peregrine: Perplexed." I was, rather, directly responding to Dr. Assimov's editorial of the same issue (May 1981), which explained why the magazine prints "artsy" stories (like "Peregrine"), despite Dr. Assimov's personal preference for the storytelling, action type. The point of my letter was clearly "a vote for the . . . storytelling type." Don't take it personal. I admire all published authors; one's writing would not be unique if nobody poked a little fun at it. I'm glad you thought my letter worthy of response.

And unless you spent about four hours trying to understand my letter, I believe it did cost me somewhat more to read your story than it cost you to read my letter.

But my main reason for writing is—WHEN CAN I HAVE IT OUT WITH HARLAN ELLISON!? COME ON! LET'S GO! I'M READY! PUT 'EM UP!

Henry Lee Morgenstern
1107 Varela Street
Key West, Florida 33040

Never you mind about Harlan. Wait till you see what I do to you for misspelling my name in a particularly offensive way.
—Isaac Asimov

Dear Editor:

I have enjoyed science fiction for almost forty years. I have enjoyed every issue of your magazine. Enough to keep paying the newsstand price. Well, may it please you to know that you are beyond the probationary period now, and my subscription is on its way.

My favorite science fiction provokes what one of my English teachers called the "humph! reaction." He said if, when you have finished a piece of writing, you went "Humph!", it was a *good* piece of writing. Mostly, that describes the contents of your magazine.

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The "Humph! reaction" is almost always pleasant. It is the audible manifestation of the change in mental state as your mind shifts from being drawn along by the author to continuing on its own. Like a sailplane when the towline is dropped, there is snap and a little bump, and then you are soaring!

Like other addicts, I search constantly for more of the stuff that makes me feel good. Your magazine has been a dependable source of mental launches.

Sincerely,

Ray Allis
2931 S.W. 339th Street
Federal Way
WA 98003

That's an interesting criterion of worth, but I presume not the only one. Now I *know that something is good, when I say, "Gee!"*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Editor:

Just wanted to say how much I'm enjoying Avram Davidson's Adventures in Unhistory. He's as wise and funny and delightful in nonfiction as he is in fiction. The elegance of his solutions is striking —especially the sherlocking out the Hyperboreans by means of amber. Are there any more of these coming?

And how about some more PEREGRINE, please?

Sincerely,

Ruth Berman
Minneapolis, MN

This is a relief. Avram won't have to call on Harlan Ellison for violence in this case.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Editor:

I hope I'm the first to inform you of a break in the story line in "Aquila" (Jan. 18, 1982). As I read through page 143, the last word is "thump," but the next "thump" does not appear until page 146. Then, when I got to page 149, instead of the next word being on page 150, I had to backtrack to page 144. From page 145, I then had to go to page 150. This is the first time I've discovered something like this in your magazine, and it's quite novel. Rather fun to think that you are, after all, as human as the rest of us.

Sincerely,

Joseph A. Wardlow III
Paterson, NJ

Boy, are we human! I will not quote what Shawna says when something like this turns up, because you wouldn't believe that that gorgeous creature can say such things.

—Isaac Asimov

I won't say here what I said when I discovered that error, but I will say that I apologize heartily and I'll try not to let it happen again.

—Shawna McCarthy

To the Editor:

This a casting of votes for and against current policies.

I hate to see good short story space wasted on puzzles and on

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most articles—all of those run in 1981, for instance.

I feel generous toward calendars, since they take only a page, and someone may look at them.

Classified ads, after all help to bring us *Asimov's*; so I can't fault that section. All the rest is, I feel, legitimate. I don't even mind the confusion of science fiction with fantasy. It's all fantasy anyway, but I do like a little science in it from time to time.

But if you can get rid of the superfluous material noted above, and give us one or two more short stories, I'd appreciate it.

William F. Poynter
Santa Rosa, CA

On the whole, I think you are decently tolerant, and if there were a great big mass movement in favor of nothing but fiction, we would have to consider it. The trouble is that there are lots of people who like puzzles and articles (in moderation, of course).

—Isaac Asimov

Editor's note:

Please send all letters for publication to Editor, *IAsfm,* Davis Publications, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10017. Letters should be typed and double-spaced. If you would like a reply, please enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope. ●

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SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

July 15 (postmark) is the deadline to join the Chicago WorldCon by mail. Make your plans now for social weekends with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists and fellow fans. For a longer, later list, an explanation of cons, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE (addressed, stamped envelope) at 9850 Fairfax Sq. #232, Fairfax VA 22031. (703) 273-6111 is the hot line. If a machine answers, leave your area code and number. I'll call back on my nickel. Send me SASE when writing cons. When phoning, identify yourself. For free listings, tell me about your con 5 months ahead. Look for me as Filthy Pierre at cons.

JULY, 1982

16-18—NECon. For info, write: **C/O Booth, 67 Birchland Ave., Pawtucket RI 02860.** Or phone **(401) 722-4738** (10 am to 10 pm only, not collect). Con will be held in: Bristol RI (if city omitted, same as in address). Guests will include: T. Klein, M. McDowell, J. Bauman, Ryan.

16-18—UniCon. Washington Sheraton Inn, Silver Spring MD (near Washington DC). H. ("Mission of Gravity") Clement Stubbs, Karl Kofoed, R. A. Madle, George (Amra, Owlswick Press) Scithers. No connection with UniCons in Kansas City or overseas. Masquerade. First one since 1980.

16-18—Con*Stellation. Sheraton Hotel, Huntsville AL. Phyllis ("Born to Exile") Eisenstein, A. J. ("My Lord Barbarian") Offutt. Costumes, BBQ banquet. No connection to the 1983 WorldCon.

16-18—OKon. Camelot Hotel, Tulsa OK. Wilson Arthur (Bob) ("Year of the Quiet Sun") Tucker, Fred ("Cool War") Pohl, Lee ("Voice out of Raman") Killough, Kelly & Polly Freas. Masquerade.

23-25—Archon, (314) 521-9690 or 727-8607. St. Louis MO. Stephen King, Robert Bloch, Tanith Lee, C. J. Cherryh, Ed Bryant, H. Waldrop, Joe Haldeman, W. A. Tucker, G. R. R. Martin, Liebscher.

23-25—RiverCon. (502) 634-9333. Louisville KY. G. R. ("Dorsai") Dickson, D. Kyle. Riverboat ride.

23-26—FairCon, 1/r 39 Patrick Hill Rd., Glasgow G11 5BY, UK. Annual Scottish con. Central Hotel.

30-1 August—ParaCon, Box 1156, State College PA 16801. Janet Morris, Jill Bauman. Fifth annual.

AUGUST

6-8—Summer Media Fest, 10019 Greenbelt Rd. #303, Seabrook MD 20706. Rosslyn VA (near Washington DC). Successor to Auust Party, the fannish Trek con. No big-name guests, just good vibes.

6-8—OmaCon, Box 14105, Omaha NE 68124. Fred ("Gateway") Pohl, Jack ("Humanoids") Williamson, W. A. (Bob) Tucker, artist Steve Gray, Stan & Carol Nevins. "SF & pro-space con." Second annual con.

10-13—EuroCon, CCP 23-20234, Ch-2300, La Chaux de Fonds, Switzerland. P. Versins. Continental con.

13-15—ConGeneric, c/o Osfol-Con, Box 12728, Portland OR 97212. Beaverton OR. Marta Randall, Norman Hartman, F. M. Busby, J. Varley, M. K. Wren, Steve Perry, Steven B. Bieler, Gene Van Troyer.

13-13—MythCon, Box 5276, Orange CA 92667. Marion Zimmer (Darkover) Bradley, Katherine (Deryni) Kurtz, Tim Kirk, P. E. Zimmer, scholars A. Noel & K. Lindskoog. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis stress.

SEPTEMBER, 1982

2-6—ChiCon IV, Box A3120, Chicago IL 60690. A. Bertram (Rim Worlds) Chandler, Kelly Freas, Lee Hoffman. The 1982 WorldCon. Join by July 16 (postmark) for $50, or pay more at the door.

SEPTEMBER, 1983

1-5—ConStellation, Box 1046, Baltimore MD 21203. John (Zanzibar) Brunner, D. Kyle, Jack (Well of Souls) Chalker. The 1983 WorldCon. Go to smaller cons if you can to prepare for the WorldCons.

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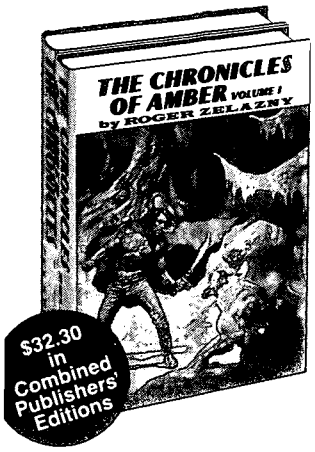

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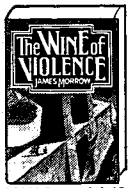

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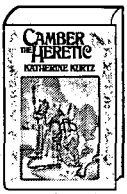

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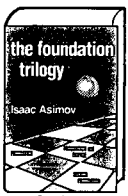

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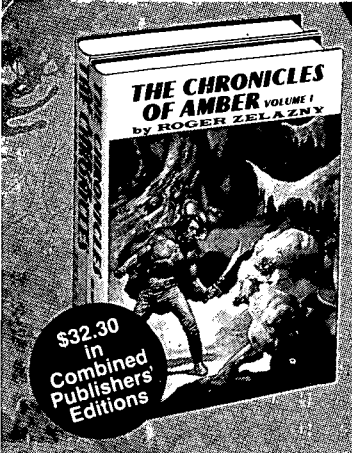

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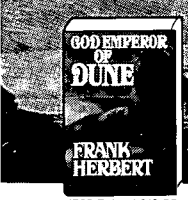

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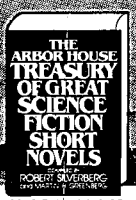

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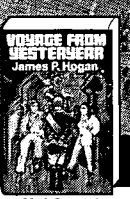

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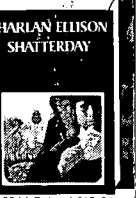

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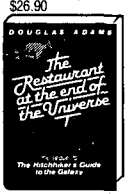

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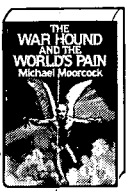

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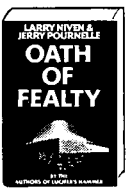

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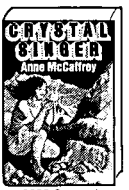

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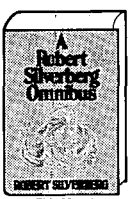

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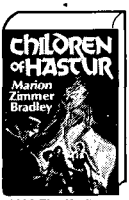

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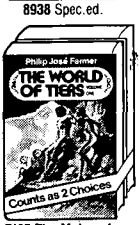

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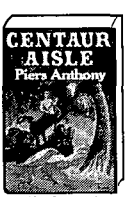

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